

# **MARDIOS BEACH**

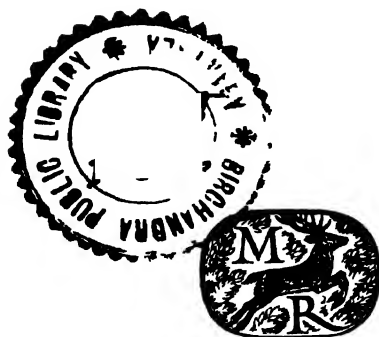
*By the same author*

**CORPUS OF JOE BAILEY**

# MARDIOS BEACH

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*a novel by*  
OAKLEY HALL



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**FRIDAY**



# Friday 1

BILL GREGORY sat on the edge of the lot-manager's desk with his arms folded, looking out the window at the cars on the lot. It was late afternoon, and the sun was breaking through the high fog over San Diego, gleaming on the polished paint jobs and ricocheting, very bright, off the chrome grilles and bumpers and trim. The cars looked beautiful as hell there in the sun on the black asphalt, surrounded by white fenceposts with blue and yellow foil strips strung between them, the bright strands spiraling endlessly in the slight breeze off San Diego Bay.

There were sixty-eight cars on the lot, not one older than a '50, all clean cars. It was his downtown lot, his biggest, his prestige lot. Painted in huge black letters on the wall of the concrete warehouse that overlooked the cars was the sign:

WILLY BILL GREGORY  
CLEAN CARS EASY TERMS

I pay top dollar  
You pay bottom dollar

"Oh, say, Bill," Dave Meade, the manager, said behind him. "Mike Cohn phoned. He says that toy car for your kid's ready any time you want to pick it up."

He, Bill, grunted.

"Couple of the boys saw it over at the body shop. They said it was a real good job."

He nodded, still looking out at the cars. Eight Cads, eight Roadmasters, three—four—Lincolns, four Chryslers; he frowned and glanced around at the big Buicks again. All '52s. "Give me the sheets for the last couple weeks," he said and put his hand out behind his back.

"Sure. Sure, Bill." A drawer slid open and papers shuffled. "Here you are, Bill."

The sheets were between his fingers. He checked rapidly down the listings of sales and purchases. "Heavy on those Roadmasters," he said, handed the sheets back to Dave Meade, and waited. In the room next door he could hear a salesman and a customer beating it back and forth. The salesmen never quoted final figures except in one of the sales cubicles where the lot manager could overhear the dickering. Then when the salesman came in for the final okay the manager didn't have to be filled-in and the customer didn't have to sit alone so long that he had time to reconsider. This customer had a Texas voice and sounded tough. Dave Meade was rustling the sheets. "Yeah, I guess we are getting pretty heavy on them at that, Bill."

He waited, watching the coloured kid in his neat white overalls running a dustrag over the top of a '50 blue Pontiac. Two salesmen in flowered sports shirts and fibre hats lounged on canvas chairs at a table beneath a beach umbrella, each sucking on a Coke. He listened to the talk in the next room with contempt. There weren't any real salesmen any more. The Texan sounded tough, but he wasn't tough. Inside he was jelly, because he had to have that '51 cream Merc convertible with more chrome and more horses and more gadgets than the car he had already. Sure, the lots had to sell cars to keep running, but the customers had to have them worse than the lots had to sell them. They'd see a flashy job all polished and with thick retreads and whitewalls and they'd have to have it like a lush has to have another drink, and then in six months or a year or two there'd be another one they'd see that they had to have. *Had* to have. The tough Texan in there with the salesman was probably hocked to his gold fillings on the car he was going to turn in, and now he'd go in over his Stetson for that cream-coloured Mercury. But he had to make a deal where he thought he'd squeezed the price down a hundred bucks and got a free brake reline, so he could brag to his wife and friends how he'd beat a used-car dealer on a trade.

"Yeah, I've been worrying about those Roadmasters myself, Bill," Dave Meade said finally. "What I was thinking of doing, I was going to run them up front and drop them a hundred—"

"Drop two of them two hundred and run an ad. Drop the others fifty. Don't take any more in now unless you can knock them below blue book."

The salesman in the next room lowered his voice, but not enough so Dave Meade couldn't hear him, and offered to give the Texan half his commission, cash on the line, to close the deal. Then a chair scraped back and the salesman came into the manager's office; he was fat, sunburned, and wore dark glasses. "Hi, Mr. Gregory," he said politely. He made a motion of cutting his hand in half, and Dave Meade quickly got some bills out of his drawer. The salesman stuffed them into his wallet, picked up a contract, and said, "I think we ought to reline those brakes for him, Dave."

"Sure. Tell him to bring it in any time next week."

The salesman went back to the little sales office. Outside, another salesman was leaning on the door of a maroon Ford ranch wagon, talking to the Navy j.g. who was sitting inside. He was shaking the j.g.'s car keys in his hand as he talked. The salesman was supposed to get a customer's keys right away and hold on to them—so the customer couldn't suddenly drive off discouraged or in a huff—until a deal was made or became hopeless.

He, Bill, grinned as he remembered the time he had held onto a customer's keys too long and the customer had walked out and called a cop to get his keys back for him. But he had been a better salesman than any of these punks. He said, "Those ranch wagons are hot now, aren't they?"

"Real hot, Bill. We can't keep them more than—"

"Better jack them up all around. If that j.g. doesn't take that one, put somebody in it and send them around to the other lots to see what they're giving. Let me know as soon as you get a check on it."

"Well, I don't know, Bill. They know all our boys. Last time—"

He swung around to look at Dave Meade, who stopped, his red face flushing darkly. He had heavy jowls, a narrow forehead, and his long blond hair was combed thick over his temples. He wasn't as crummy and stupid as some of the lot managers, he was about the best of the bunch, but, like all of them, he was too slow and thick and scared ever to do anything on his own. He'd never be anything but a dumb lot manager, working for somebody else.

"I'll tell you what you do," he said to Dave Meade. "School's out now. They've got an employment agency out there at State College. You call them up. You get hold of a bright clean-looking kid that looks like he might own a ranch wagon and wants to work for a day. You stick him in that wagon and send him around with a pencil and paper to find out what the other lots are giving on them, straight and trade. You give him a buck and a half an hour and call me at my office and tell me what he's got written on his piece of paper. How's that sound?"

"Say, that's a good idea, Bill!" Dave Meade said. He was still flushed. On the little finger of one of his hands was a gold ring set with a fat rock, and he kept nervously turning it. "Maybe if this kid looks sharp we ought to can Jack Herrick and give the kid a job for the summer. Say, I've been meaning to talk to you about Herrick, Bill. He's sure not pulling his quota."

"Herrick's that skinny one?"

"Yeah. I've talked to him, Bill, but—"

"Let me try sticking a pin in him. You can them and they just go on relief and next year you pay more taxes." He got up and moved across to the open door of Dave Meade's office, his heels striking hollowly on the plank floor. He stood in the doorway with his hands on his hips. The traffic on State Street streamed by the lot, the signals clanged and changed colour, and the flow stopped like water shut off by a faucet. With a grind of gears and racing of motors, cars spurted through the intersection from the cross street. He wondered how many cars there were in San Diego.

He gazed down at Herrick, sitting at the metal table with his Coke; a jerk salesman who wasn't carrying his weight. He remembered that Herrick had come to him once a year or so ago to ask about some bum stock his sister was thinking of buying. Herrick was a kind of pitiful-looking guy. Maybe he was sick. Maybe he had trouble at home.

"Herrick!" he called. Both salesmen sitting at the table swung around, and Herrick got to his feet. "While you're sitting around, Herrick, how about grabbing a rag and helping the jig dust up? Looks like he's getting behind."

"Sure, Mr. Gregory," Herrick said and started for the sheds at a trot. The other salesman had risen too; he looked thankful as a Chevrolet turned into the far driveway and hurried down to meet it.

Back inside the office Dave Meade was chewing on an unlit cigar and frowning down at the sheets. "Let me know if he picks up," he said to Dave Meade. "And let me know what your college kid gets on that wagon."

"Sure, Bill. I sure will."

"I'll drop in Monday if I get time."

"Always glad to see you, Bill," Dave Meade said, and it was a damn lie. "It doesn't seem like you get around as much as you used to. Keeping pretty busy, I guess."

"Busy as hell. Anyway, I don't have to bother you much. You're cutting it all right." Immediately he was furious with himself for feeling he needed to flatter Dave Meade like that, as though he had to try to make Dave Meade like him. Dave Meade worked for him and made good dough and was glad he had his job; to hell with whether Dave Meade liked him. He swung around and hurried out.

In his Cadillac convertible the leather seat was hot and the chrome sill burned his arm through his coat sleeve. He drove out of the lot, bulled his way into the current of traffic, and, a block down on State, turned into the dim cool cavern of Mike Cohn's body shop.

Mike put down his power wirebrush and came over, pushing his goggles up on his dusty forehead. "All set, Bill," he

said, and trundled the little car out from under a work bench.

It was larger than the usual kid's car, black, like his own Cadillac, with a curved plexiglass windshield, swept-up fishtail rear fenders, and a continental tyre rack set upright between them.

"Looks good, Mike," he said. He grinned, looking down at the little car; Billy ought to get a real boot out of it. The seats were upholstered in red imitation leather. "It ought to have a horn," he said. "I never thought about a horn, damn it." He bent to inspect the speedometer and the instrument panel.

"You can get a bike horn with a rubber bulb," Mike said. "Stick it on the side there. If you think you can stand the racket."

"He'll want people to know he's coming. Good job, Mike; the kid'll love it."

"Well, I'm sorry we couldn't get it by his birthday. We had to tear it all down. The first frame we made was so heavy you couldn't even lift it. It's still heavy as hell. Those wheels are heavy."

"Maybe pushing this heap around will give the kid some appetite."

"Ought to. Tell him there's a thousand-mile warranty on it."

"What's the gaff?"

"Hundred and forty bucks. I've got a ticket made out on it here if—"

"Put it on the bill for the lot for body work, will you? So I can charge it off."

Mike Cohn laughed. "Every little bit counts, uh, Bill? I'll bet you pay a bastard of a tax."

"A bastard," he said. "I'm fat as hell this year too. Goddam it, you sweat your butt off to make it, and they've got a six-inch pipe stuck into you to drain it off. Good Christ, this thing's heavy! Give me a hand."

Together they lifted the toy car into the trunk of the Cad. He tucked the lap robe in around it, and Mike tied down the lid of the trunk, which would not close over the car, with a



length of greasy cord.

Bucking the four-thirty traffic in the big Cadillac, one hand gripping a chrome top-bracket and the other the wheel, the sun and wind in his face, he thought about Billy's eyes popping out when he saw the little car. His son, his four-year-old son, with the straight little back and dark eyes that examined you with that steady intent stare, and the way the reddish hair—*his* hair, although it was more Bea's face—grew away from his forehead and into a little cowlick at the back. But too thin, he thought, way too thin, and that damn stutter.

"Stupid grunt-brain!" he said as a panel truck swung sharply in front of him. He hated people who cut in front of him. The truck immediately pulled to a stop for the signal at Laurel Street. "Goddam stupid truck driver!" He slammed on the brakes, cursing, and suddenly it was all down on him like a swarm of bees—the frustration of having to put up with all the damn stupid jerks, of having to flatter a greaseball like Dave Meade because lot managers who didn't try to rob you blind were hard to come by, of having to go easy on Herrick because even half-wit salesmen were hard to come by these days, and all the rest. A guy like him turned up and built a business—seven used-car lots in the county, a big piece of a radio station, a partnership in an air-freight and air-coach line running up and down the coast, and pieces of other things too—built it all up over the tough years with his sweat and his guts and not giving in to all the bastards trying to beat him down and not getting gypped loose from it by all the bastards trying to beat him out, never a minute when it was safe to look away. Giving jobs to all the stupid bums who couldn't hack it by themselves; damn dumb bastards, he gave them jobs but that wasn't enough—they had to tax off the dough he'd sweated his life away on to give relief to all the even crummier bums who couldn't hold a job at all, didn't even want to . . .

The light clanged and changed, the panel truck pulled away in front of him. He trod down on the accelerator, frowning, suddenly frightened. What the hell was the matter with him? Bang! he'd gone off like a firecracker just because a truck had

cut in front of him. He was doing that too much lately. That wasn't good, blowing like that without any reason. He wasn't a kid any more, he was forty-two; all at once he felt an unreasoning fear for his body, his stomach, his nerves. But if he went to a doctor he knew what he'd be told: take it easier, take a vacation, stop drinking so much, smoking so much. Maybe he ought to take a vacation though, he and Billy and Bea—go off somewhere for a week or two. Or just stay at home in Mardios and hit the beach every day, swim and lie out in the sun. He hadn't had a vacation since he'd married Bea, more than five years ago, and the honeymoon had been three days at Las Vegas. The last real vacation he'd had was that week he'd spent in Palm Springs with Hattie.

Six years ago that had been. Six years ago, and he had never known what had gone wrong. It had been all set, he'd been going to marry her, and then one day she'd just said no, uh-uh, sorry, Bill, but she guessed not, and he'd had to pretend he wasn't mad or hurt and all that had happened was that she'd almost snaked him into it. Then everything slowly started to fall apart, going lousy and tasting bad, until he'd found Bea and married Bea. But almost right away it had started up again with Hattie, almost like before, had gone along like before until recently, until he'd met Ardath. Even after that; because he'd sold the house on Point Loma last year and built on the beach in Mardios because Hattie had spotted the fact that beach property in Southern California was going to boom and bought a house there and then had liked the town and the beach so much. And even last Christmas—he felt a surge of emotion for Hattie, as every once in a while it would come over him, and thought, maybe if they'd got married that time it would have been okay. And Keith would have been his son, or anyway his stepson. He remembered Keith saying to him once, "Say, Bill, is a Cadillac a better car than a Buick?" He'd been damn proud that Keith had considered him an authority, and he was proud because he'd thought quickly enough to realize that Keith, who was at the boarding school in LA then, had had an argument with some snotty brat over Hattie's

Buick. He'd told Keith a Buick was the best car there was.

Keith should be down from the University of California any day now, to spend the summer with Hattie. He hoped Billy would grow up to be like Keith, a real boy.

Out of the traffic of San Diego now, running along the bay, the apartment houses and the roller coaster of Mission Beach distantly visible across the gray rippled water of Mission Bay, he watched the speedometer needle of the new Cadillac swing smooth and easy up to seventy miles an hour. In twenty-five minutes he would be home.

In twenty-three minutes he slowed down into the thirty-five-mile-an-hour speed limit of Mardios Beach, where the eucalyptus trees that hung over the highway on either side began. Mardios Heights rose sharply on the right; to the left the hillside fell off toward the ocean. He turned off the highway before he reached the centre of town and went down past the slick modern houses that looked out over the water, turned north again on Ocean Avenue, past the houses that fronted on the beach, past Hattie's little concrete-block house and then on a block, and swung into the driveway of his own house, his big, new, redwood, fifty-thousand-buck house with its forty-foot TV aerial, broad green lawn, and three-car garage. Twenty-five minutes on the button.

He got out of the Cad and stretched. The little MG he'd got stuck with and had brought home for Bea was not in the garage. There was no one in sight on the street or around the house, and he could hear the heavy, spaced slosh of the waves on the beach. Standing there beside the Cadillac in the cool wind off the ocean, looking at his house, suddenly for no reason he felt loneliness descend like a bucket of ice water poured over his head.

He went around to the rear of the Cadillac, jerked loose the piece of rope, and lifted Billy's car down to the pavement. He gave it a push with his foot, and it rolled easily down the drive and off onto the grass, the chrome hubcaps winking in the sun. He went on into the house. It was dim in the living room with the drapes drawn over the broad-view windows.

He stood on the wall-to-wall carpeting that had cost twenty bucks a yard, looking at the fireplace, at the squat, huge thirty-inch TV set, at the contour chair and the couches. Poker chips were piled in neat stacks of red, white, and blue on the carpet before the TV.

Mrs. Haver came in from the kitchen in her white uniform.

"Where's Bea?" he said.

"She's down at the beach by the pier, Mr. Gregory. She ought to be back pretty soon."

"Where's Billy?"

"He's out playing in his sandbox."

He moved past her, through the dining room, through the kitchen with its gleaming white sink, dishwasher, refrigerator, and stove, through the utility room with its washer, drier, ironer, and twenty-one cubic-foot freezer. Everything in the house was new. When he'd sold the house on Point Loma he'd sold everything with it, even the towels on the racks and the sheets and blankets on the beds. The guy who'd made the best offer had wanted it that way, and it had been fine with him. He liked everything new.

The screen door slammed shut behind him. The back yard had been filled with topsoil over the sand, but the yard man had never been able to get the grass to go very well and the lawn was brownish and thin. Someday, when they could trust Billy with it, he'd have a pool put in back here. He stood looking at the yard and picturing the pool in his mind's eye. The grass petered out at the beach line, and from there the beach slanted down sharply to the water's edge. Waves came curling in in unbroken lines all along the beach here. A half-mile to the north was the pier, where the main beach and the lifeguard stand were, and beyond the pier brown cliffs marched north toward Los Angeles. He could just manage to see the tiny figures on the white sand below the pier. One of them would be Bea. There was plenty of beach in front of the house, but she always went up to the pier.

To his left was a grape-stake enclosure surrounding the play equipment—swings, a slide, a little merry-go-round that had

got rusty and no longer worked, a redwood sandbox. It had seemed pretty stupid to him to have a sandbox when fifty feet away was the beach, but the architect had drawn it into the house plans, and Billy did spend a lot of time playing in it. He saw Billy's reddish close-cropped head rise above the rim of the sandbox, his face bent down and intent on whatever he was playing with.

His loneliness was abruptly gone as he hurried out to the play yard and picked his way through the clutter of toys there. He sat down on the edge of the sandbox.

Billy looked up at him and smiled briefly. He had a green dumptruck filled with sand and he was guiding it across a smoothed track edged by the butt ends of two-by-fours.

"What're you making, kid?"

"Just pppp-playing," Billy said.

He winced at that damn stutter. It made him impatient and angry, impatient because he knew Billy could lick it if he'd just try, angry because Bea was so patient about it with Billy. But at least once he had caught her crying about it. Another time they had had a beef about it and she had cried and bitched at him about his not wanting to have Billy in the first place, and he had tak-n off to go down and see Ardath.

"I've got something for you," he said. "Want to see it? It's out in front."

Billy looked up at him with his dark calm eyes, brushing the sand from the front of his red-and-white-striped T-shirt with flipperlike movements of his hands. "Wh-wh-wh—"

"Go and see. Come on, let's go." He put his hand on Billy's head and together they walked around the house past the big floor-to-ceiling windows that had to be curtained every afternoon against the glare.

The head was quiescent under his hand; the hair bristly but soft. Beneath Billy's short pants one knee was scabbed over from some fall. When Billy saw the little car he broke into a run.

Billy was sitting in it, bent over the wheel, working the wheel and the little gear lever, when he came up. He laughed

with pleasure, watching Billy in the car. "Pretty fine car, isn't it?"

Billy nodded vigorously.

"It cost a hundred and forty bucks. It ought to be a good car. Look at that. You know what that is? That's the speedometer. Tells how fast you're going. It works too." It did work; Mike had fixed it so that for every mile an hour the car was travelling the speedometer would show ten. He had thought Billy would get a charge out of that. "And that's the gas gauge, that's the oil, that's the water temp, that's the battery. That clock doesn't work but I'll get you one that does as soon as you learn how to tell time. Okay? How do you like it, kid?"

"Thanks, Ddd-daddy," Billy said, looking up at him with big eyes, and the car was worth ten times the trouble and the dough it had cost. "It's—it's—" Billy stopped trying to talk, and, pushing with his feet, got the car into the driveway, where it rolled for ten feet or so before it stopped.

"Come on," he, Bill, said. "Let's go coast it down that hill over there."

Billy pushed with his feet and the car rolled a little farther. Looking straight ahead over the windshield, Billy said, "I'm not sss-supposed to go out in the street."

"I'll be right with you," he said. He pushed Billy in the car across the street and up Ocean View Avenue, which mounted the hill steeply directly opposite the driveway. A little way up Ocean View he stopped and showed Billy how to turn the wheel to back and fill the car around. Billy looked scared and his lips were pulled tight against his teeth. "Do you want to coast down, kid?"

"Okay. What you do, you watch and see there aren't any big cars coming. Then you say 'Go!' and I'll give you a start. You steer for our driveway and then turn in on the grass to stop because you haven't got any brakes. Be sure and look at the speedometer and tell me how fast you went. Okay?"

Billy nodded again.

He stood holding the car back while Billy looked right and left. He could see Billy's hands white on the steering wheel.

**"Go," Billy whispered.**

The car rolled down the hill, wavering from side to side as Billy cramped the wheel too far. But he hit the driveway okay, although the car didn't have enough momentum to get very far into it, and drifted back into the street.

He walked down to where Billy had stopped. "Want to go again?"

Billy didn't answer, looking at the speedometer.

"How fast did you go?"

"I don't know how to read," Billy whispered. "I'm only fff-four." He'd picked up that "only four" stuff from Bea.

"Sure you do. Look. That's ten, see? Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty. Just like counting to ten—you can count up to ten. Where was the needle?"

Billy pointed.

"Sixty! Pretty fast! Let's try it again. This time you try to hold the wheel real steady. Just aim for the driveway and don't turn till you get up inside." He pushed the car up the hill again. This time Billy held the car to a straight line right up into the driveway and out on to the lawn.

Billy was pointing to the speedometer when he came up. "Hey, that's seventy-five miles an hour this time!" he said. "That's really pushing her hard. Good car, isn't it?"

"I want to go again!" Billy's face was pale, and he felt very proud of his son as he pushed the car a little farther up the hill this time. He was a gutty little kid. He was scared to death, but he wasn't going to show it. It was funny the way he'd be sometimes so gutty and sometimes so chicken it would make you sick. Like Bea that way, and Billy had that same trick of Bea's of never showing what he was thinking so that you never knew. But he was a good kid, as good a kid as anybody could want, and Bea was a wonderful girl. He'd given her a lot of bad times too. He thought of the times and especially of the bastard he'd been when Bea had told him she was pregnant and he hadn't wanted a kid; he felt the blood heat his face in sharp prickles of shame as he pushed the little car up the hill. He'd been a real dog to her a lot of times. His shame

faded and turned into the old pride that Bill Gregory from Tustin should have married someone who had been hot stuff on the LA society circuit and in the Junior League and knew all the big-time people up there—except that she'd turned so damn shy. But she had told him he was vital. The kind of vitality that made this country big and great, she had said, more intensely than he had ever heard her speak since, her big eyes blazing at him. I'm in love with you, Bill, she had said, and here they were married and with a four-year-old kid who was William Gregory, Junior.

Now here they were, he thought, with all of it suddenly changed to anger; here they were, just hanging on. Not even that, because he'd be damned if he'd bust a gut to hang on when Bea wasn't making any effort at all. Getting in bed with her was like climbing into the freezer. But she'd known about Hattie Rankin, and that that had gone on, and maybe she knew about Ardath now. But even before he'd started seeing Hattie again she'd begun to go cold; maybe that was why he'd had to go back to Hattie. Sure. And Ardath. But he remembered Billy saying to him once, "Daddy, why don't you stay at home at night like we do?" It had sounded like a corny line from an old Jackie Coogan movie, but it had hurt.

He gave Billy a couple more rides, then said, "I'm pooped out, kid. We'll do it some more tomorrow maybe." He sat on the grass and watched Billy pushing himself along the driveway. The car was pretty heavy for Billy to move by himself, but the exercise ought to be good for him. He looked at his watch. "Where's your mommy?" "Down at the beach."

He wondered if he and Billy ought to take a hike down to the pier to find Bea. Probably they would just miss her and have to walk back. To hell with going to find her anyway.

"Mr. Bbb-bannerman gave me some blocks," Billy said.

"Who?"

"He bbbb—makes houses."

"Oh yeah," he said. He knew Bannerman a little, had seen him on the beach and talked to him once or twice in the Jacaranda Bar. He remembered the two-by-four butts Billy had



been playing with in the sandbox. "Those aren't blocks," he said. "They're just old hunks of wood. You'll get splinters in your hands. When'd he give them to you?"

"This morning."

"Over at that house he's working on?" Billy nodded.

"What were you doing over there? Did your mother take you over there?"

"We went to the ssss-ssss—"

"Store. What did you do, stop by there on the way?"

Billy nodded again and in a kind of sour and frightened fury he saw them, Bea and Bannerman, who was a kind of half-ass builder, Bea and Bannerman on the beach together, Bea in Bannerman's apartment or wherever he lived, Bea and Bannerman—and he knew he was being a damn fool because Bea would never have the guts to pull anything like that.

He rose abruptly and said, "Tell Haver I went to get some cigarettes." He moved Billy and the little car off the driveway, backed the Cad out, and drove up to the main beach. Bea's MG was parked in the gravelled parking area, along with two other cars and the blue lifeguard wagon. Waves batted in along the mossy piles of the pier. Without getting out of the Cad he could see Bea lying on her beach mat, alone. He drove out of the parking area, hoping she hadn't seen him. He drove up California Street and turned on to Highway 101, where the little business block was, and stopped in front of the drugstore behind a maroon Ford convertible. In the drugstore he bought a carton of Camels. As he turned away from the cash register with the carton under his arm, there sitting at the soda fountain, his back to him, was Keith Rankin in swimming trunks and a blue sweater.

Keith was a tall boy. He even looked tall sitting down on a stool. He was talking to the girl beside him, who had a slim brown back in a white halter, a neat little can in white shorts; both of them were drinking Cokes. College kids, sloppily neat, clean-cut, tanned, California college kids; he envied them fiercely something he could never have now, could never buy for himself or achieve in any way. He remembered himself at

that age, eighteen or nineteen, running an elevator in the Bratten Building in Los Angeles. Seeing the ups and downs of life, he had always said as a joke, but it had never been anything but a bitter joke. It had only been the downs then.

He moved rapidly over toward them and saw that Keith was looking at him in the mirror over the counter. "Hi, kid!"

Keith swung around toward him. He had a long, smooth boy's face, his black hair chopped down into a flat-top cut. Except for the dark eyes and the heavy brows there was not much of Hattie in his face, yet it always reminded him of Hattie when he had first met her, a young, tough dress buyer for a big LA store, with a body by Fisher and a line of wisecracks that could peel the paint right off you if she got mad. Except that Keith didn't look tough.

"Hi, Bill," Keith said and did not look at him directly.

"School's out, uh? When'd you get down?"

"I drove down yesterday."

He nodded and glanced out the window. The convertible at the curb had looked familiar; it was the one he'd given Hattie a couple of years ago, which she had passed on to Keith. Keith had kept it looking good. That was a new paint job, and there was a spotlight, fog lights, probably straight pipes. The girl with Keith had turned to face him. She was cute and round, with short brown hair, too much makeup, and that snotty I-know-all-about-it look all the young girls seemed to have these days.

"Who's your girl?" he said to Keith.

"This is Mary-Lynn," Keith said and flushed. "I mean Miss Sieber. This is Mr. Gregory, Mary-Lynn."

"Hello, Mr. Gregory," the girl said and smiled shyly.

"*Bill* Gregory. You kids looked like a Coke ad sitting here. I—" He stopped, uncomfortable. He wondered why Keith was always so ill at ease with him. He'd known Keith since he was about eleven. Maybe Keith knew about him and Hattie. But Hattie had said he didn't, and most of the time Keith had been away somewhere at school, and when he was at home Hattie had been careful as hell. "Well, say" he said and kicked at the

base of Keith's stool. "It's great to see you back down here. I was thinking maybe we ought to have a little celebration."

Keith reached awkwardly around for his Coke, took a drink, and stared down into his glass.

He, Bill, took the carton of cigarettes from under his arm, a pack from the carton, opened the pack, and offered it to the girl, who took a cigarette from it and thanked him. Keith shook his head. He took one himself. The girl touched his hand as he lit her cigarette for her. She knew the tricks; they all did.

"How about this?" he said. "I'll stand us all sirloins and dancing down at Tops in San Diego tonight. What do you think about that?"

"Oh, it sounds wonderful!" Mary-Lynn said.

"Well, I guess I can't," Keith said. "Thanks a lot though," he said and licked his lips. His big broad hairless hand was gripping the little Coke glass as though he were trying to break it. "I've got to help Hattie do some things tonight," he said. "I promised her I'd—"

"I thought we'd get Hat to come along too. She ought to have a night out once in a while. She works too hard. Let's call her up and see if she wants to go."

"Well, she said she had to work tonight," Keith said. "She said she had some important letters and stuff she had to get off tonight. She—well, I know she can't go, and I promised I'd help her with some stuff, and I've got to do some unpacking. Thanks a lot though." Keith put down his glass and rubbed the palms of his hands on his sweater.

All at once he knew that Keith did not like him, and it was like a kick in the crotch when you'd had your hand out to shake hands. Over the years it had not been that Keith was just shy with him; Keith didn't like him.

He felt his grin grow stiff and painful. "How's your car running?" he asked suddenly.

"Okay," Keith said, nodding. "It runs fine."

"If you're thinking about selling it, now's the time. Prices are starting down to break your heart."

"Well, I guess I wouldn't want to sell it."

The girl was smoking nervously, watching Keith out of the corners of her eyes, sitting very erect with her knees held close together. In a way, he thought, she looked like Hat too; a trace of the toughness was there, and she had that bitchy, half-scared, half-sure-of-herself look. That's the way they did though: Keith would pick them to look like Hat, and probably when Billy got to be this age he would pick them like Bea. He felt hard, cold, resentful, and completely lonely. What the hell was he doing, talking to those jerk kids? "Probably get you a thousand or eleven hundred on it," he said to Keith. "There's a new Merc convertible out on my Le Mesa lot that would really flip you. All ducked out. Overdrive, continental tyre rack, about eight carburettors; somebody spent a hell of a lot of dough on it. Why don't you ask your mother about it?"

"Well, I guess—"

"Sure, that heap you've got runs fine," he went on. "But a car isn't just transportation any more. There's dough tied up in that car. You have to watch it. That Caddy of mine came to about eight thousand by the time I had everything I wanted on it." He watched Keith, who would not meet his eyes, and felt his resentment growing with or out of the cold dripping away of his confidence. "That's an investment," he said. "You have to watch them like stocks. Sell before you lose your shirt, buy when you get a good deal. That one of yours was up for twenty-two hundred when I gave it to your mother."

He watched keenly to see how Keith liked that one. He knew damn well Hattie hadn't told Keith he'd given her the convertible.

Keith picked up his Coke again. His eyes slid towards the window where the car was visible. "That right?" he said in a low voice.

"Twenty-two hundred bucks. Now they're dropping fast. Lots of new cars coming off now, and the government's eased up on down payments so anybody can borrow the money to get one."

"I suppose it's a bad time to be a used-car dealer," the girl

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said. "I mean, now, I mean."

"No honey," he said. "It's always good times for used-car dealers in Southern California."

Mary-Lynn laughed nervously. Keith was staring out the window at the convertible.

"If they're smart," he went on. "Just like anything else. Well, kid, let me know when you get ready to trade in that heap. I'll get you a good deal."

Keith just nodded.

He waved a hand to them and went outside. Going past the window, he tried to swagger a little. But he felt sick. He couldn't just say to hell with it, because he'd always liked Keith. What had he ever done that Keith shouldn't like him? He'd given Keith a lot of things when he was a kid, he'd taken Hattie and Keith places a lot of times—and the convertible.

Goddam dumb jerk kid, he thought and tried to laugh it off. But it wouldn't laugh off. And Billy talking about those hunks of two-by-fours when he'd just brought the hundred-and-forty-buck toy car home. Billy was afraid of him; Bea had told him that. In a quick flash he saw Bea and Bannerman together, and saw himself coming in to beat the living hell out of Bannerman and giving Bea a swat in the teeth she'd never forget. That was stu<sup>id</sup>. Why the hell did he think things like that? Bea wouldn't have the guts. She was—afraid of him. And Dave Meade this afternoon; and Herrick had looked as though he was going to wet his pants.

He discovered that he'd gone past the Cad, and he turned back, then turned again. He wasn't going home. He went around the corner and started toward the Jacaranda Bar. Maybe he would run down and see Ardath tonight. But Ardath was in LA, probably sacked in with that goddam ex-husband of hers. The last time Ardath had taken off for LA he'd gone over to Hattie's place—that had been at Christmas, and it was the last time he'd been at Hattie's. Hattie had been feeling pretty low because Keith wasn't coming down from Cal for the holidays. They'd had a good party, just the two of them. But not really good. That with Hattie was all over, and they'd both

known it. To hell with Hattie and with Keith. And to hell with Ardath, the whore. She got paid a little more complicatedly to save her face, which wasn't worth saving, but she was still a whore.

There was no one else in the Jacaranda. Ernie, the bartender, wasn't even there; some Mex he'd never seen before was behind the bar. After he'd had a drink he got into the phone booth and started making phone calls to see if he could get hold of someone, anyone, to have a drink with him or go out and eat with him. Finally he found out about a poker game that night at Marty Reed's. Marty Reed was no friend of his, and he didn't like poker, but it was someplace to go and something to do. He went back to the bar and watched the Mexican put together another highball.

## Friday 2

KEITH RANKIN sipped his Coke, which tasted nasty-sweet now. He hadn't known that Bill Gregory had given Hattie his car. She'd never told him that.

"That was really a nervous sports coat he had on, wasn't it?" Mary-Lynn said.

"Yeah," he said. Nobody in the FeeGee house at Cal would have been caught dead in a sports coat like that. Great big red and brown squares. And those damn tight white trunks he'd worn to the beach last summer. He felt dazed and sick.

"Do used-car dealers make a lot of money?" Mary-Lynn asked.

"Hell yes!" The sonovabitch—his lips shaped the words silently. What the hell had Hattie taken the car from Bill Gregory for? Probably Bill was just lying. "Let's go," he said to

Mary-Lynn, got up, stretched, and looked covertly out the window at his car. The chrome glinted in the sun, but the maroon paint was dusty. "Let's go," he said again.

Mary-Lynn was staying with her cousin, Jeanne Bogan, in Mardios Beach. She went to San Diego State. He'd met her last summer on the beach and had taken her around a lot and made out all right with her, and when he'd gone up to Berkeley last fall they'd written a few times. But he'd got the idea she was sucking around for him to invite her up to Cal for a week-end and hadn't liked being worked so she could big-deal it, so he'd quit writing. Then he'd met her on the beach again today, and she had a pretty fine build and was cute enough, even if she was a little cheap-looking sometimes and apt to talk bop-talk, which the girls up at Cal would never do.

But it had been good to see her again, and it was good to know he had dates lined up for the summer. Mardios was a small place, even with the summer people, and there weren't any other girls in town who had anything on the ball. It had been fun telling her about everything up at Cal, until Bill Gregory had come in. It seemed that almost as long as he could remember, whenever he was staying with Hattie, Bill Gregory was always turning up. Always, with Hattie, he would find himself getting all tense because he was afraid that Bill Gregory would come around. And Bill Gregory always did, like today, and like last fall, the night before he was to leave for Berkeley. There had been a lot of things he had to talk to Hattie about and he was nervous as hell about going off to college, and Bill Gregory had come over to sit around and drink Hattie's liquor and tell him not to worry about college, it would be real easy, look at the jerks that got through okay—telling him all about it when Bill Gregory hadn't even finished high school, for God's sake! He felt a little sick from the Coke as he followed Mary-Lynn outside, and he was thinking of the picture of Hattie he had on his dresser in the fraternity house and that time Greer had come in and whistled and said, who the hell's that? Your sister? And how about a date? He'd gotten such a kick out of that. And other guys too saying, hey,

how about getting us a date with your mother? It was a good photograph, and Hattie looked just like a real smooth college girl, only older—but not even much older.

Traffic whipped by on the highway. Driving Mary-Lynn home, he left the clutch half out as he shifted, rasping the gears, and heavy-footed it on the gas—and felt like a jerk for doing it. He forced himself to think about Walt Greer, who was a junior and varsity football and who lived in Los Angeles and had asked him to come up to LA to stay a week or so sometime this summer. Good old Walt! The tyres squealed as he turned off the highway and up Mardios Heights toward the Bogans' house. When he stopped before it Mary-Lynn took the lipstick out of her straw bag, twisted the rear-view mirror around, and, leaning toward it, painted her mouth.

"Does your mother go with that Mr. Gregory?" she asked.

"No," he said. Mary-Lynn glanced at him. "She used to," he said. The Coke was heavy and sweet on his stomach. He felt as if he were going to regurge it. "Well, I'd better get going," he said. "I'll see you, Mary-Lynn."

She got out and he raced the motor. He tried to grin at her; maybe he'd call her up tonight about a date. As he drove on up the hill he swivelled the rear-view mirror back into place and watched her going up the walk to the Bogans' house, her legs brown and real good in the late sunlight. He felt a queer wrench at his heart.

He slapped his hand, hard, against the dashboard. Maybe all Bill Gregory had meant was that he had given Hattie a good deal when she'd bought the car. Probably that was it. Hattie ought to be home from San Diego by now. He came up to the road that led along the crest of Mardios Heights and turned right. Mardios Beach lay below him, TV aerials and chimneys and roofs showing through the trees. Farther down the highway was the business block and the hotel, below them the railroad tracks, the pier, the houses lining the beach, the ocean curving away to the west.

Almost below him, on the beach, was Hattie's house with its black roof and whitish concrete-block walls. Looking down



at it, he remembered Galesburg, where he had lived when he was a kid, before he had come out here to be with Hattie—his grandmother's beat-up old house with the player piano in the parlour, the tall ugly old three-storey house where he'd lived with his Aunt Lorraine and Uncle John, the snow on the trees in the winter and the dirty snow in the streets, everybody with B.O. in their hot clothes with the steam heat and his grandmother and a lot of other old people coming over for a giant, stuff-gut Sunday dinner and afterwards everybody sitting around yawning and talking politics. Those winter Sunday afternoons were what he remembered most vividly about Illinois now, and whenever his grandmother and Aunt Lorraine and Uncle John drove out to California to see him and Hattie he would find himself feeling that same heavy, tense sleepiness of those Sunday afternoons in Galesburg.

He stopped on the black-topped winding road and sat staring out at the ocean. Korea was way out there somewhere, and his grades hadn't been any too peachy-keen his first two semesters of college. He had turned eighteen in December, and if he didn't make better grades next year he'd get drafted and be sent out there to Korea and probably whonked. Except it looked as though there was going to be a truce. But he should be able to take care of himself okay though, if he got sent to Korea—ROTC at Cal and two years at the military academy in LA. That was where he'd first seen Bill Gregory; 1945, it had been, right after the other war. Sometimes on Saturdays when Hattie had come to pick him up she'd brought Bill Gregory with her. The military academy had been a real snotty place, with a whole lot of real rich kids, and he'd been ashamed and mad because they'd thought Bill Gregory was his father or stepfather and Bill Gregory was such a horrible guy. In contrast with the other boys' fathers he'd been really awful, wearing crummy loud clothes and talking loud, and that time he'd made a big stink when he, Keith, had been restricted for the week-end by the dormitory provost for something. That had been a long time ago, and it had been a long time ago, too, that Bill Gregory had married Mrs. Gregory and he'd thought

everything was going to be all right, but still it seemed that he was always around. There was his house down there, with that damn silly aerial that was the tallest around, only a block from Hattie's.

He rubbed his forehead and tried not to think about it any more. He needed to talk to somebody though. Not about anything in particular, just talk. Dick Bannerman was the only older guy he'd ever been able to talk to, really; Dick was a good friend of his; but Dick was probably still at work on that house he was building. He wished he could talk to his father, but nobody knew where he was. His father had been, and maybe he still was, a trumpeter in a band. "And a damn good trumpeter, too," Hattie always added, but he had never been able to tell whether it was with pride or scorn. She had called him Bunny because he was as good as Bunny Berigan when he was going good. She had married him when she was eighteen—only as old as he was now, for Christ's sake! He had gone off and left her a year or so later; she had never heard from him again. It was all he knew.

He thought he'd go and see if Dick Bannerman was home.

As he drove on along the crest he put a hand out to the steering column to touch the registration certificate in its plastic cover. Mrs. Harriet Rankin, the slip said. He turned down California Street. Dick Bannerman lived two blocks below the crest, in a little duplex. But the red pickup was not in the drive, the garage door was closed, the shades drawn in the windows.

He drove past and home to Hattie's house on the beach. He went inside through the garage and the back door. Hattie's hardtop Olds was in the garage, two tone, brown and red-brown, like Bill Gregory's sports coat. "He's a hell of a good guy," she had said to him once. "He's a big man." He tried to shake it out of his head, shuffling his feet as he moved through the kitchen. Hattie was sitting at the typewriter at her little desk by the window in the living room, wearing a tailored black and white robe and glasses with heavy black rims. She took a shower when she got up in the morning and when she

came home from work at night.

She grinned at him. "Been hitting the beach all day?"

"Yeah," he said, stopping and leaning in the kitchen doorway. "Yeah, it was pretty good down at the beach." He looked at her and saw, like a double exposure, her face and the face in the photograph on his dresser in the FeeGee house at Cal, and one was subtly altered now, as though out of focus. But what was changed, for Christ's sake? She was sure good-looking, better looking than any girl at Cal he'd ever taken out, better looking than Sara Greenlaw, or than Mary-Lynn Sieber, her face round, brown, strong, with the red lips folding out of it softly, the dark, wide-set eyes behind her reading glasses, her black hair—still damp around the edges from her shower—cut and shaped like a tight-fitting cap. She looked about twenty-five instead of thirty-seven and his mother. He felt he was staring at her too intently and looked past her out the window at the empty beach and the waves breaking.

"I was talking to Mary-Lynn," he said. "She's staying at the Bogans' again this summer, it turns out."

"Well," Hattie said. "Things are looking up, are they? Do you want to hop down to the store for me? We need some things for dinner. There's a list on the drainboard."

"Sure," he said and swung around thankfully. He put the grocery list in his pocket and took off for the store. On the way home again he decided he'd better wash his car tonight. It was pretty dirty after the trip down from Berkeley. And maybe he'd better wax it too.

He washed the car before dinner, gobbled down the lamb chops, peas, and fried potatoes Hattie fixed, excused himself as soon as he had finished. Hattie watched him with a puzzled frown as he backed away from the kitchen table and told her to leave the dishes, he would do them later.

Waxing the car, he began to feel better, concentrating on what he was doing. He worked rapidly getting the wax on. When he began to rub it off the hood and fenders glowed beautifully under the bare light bulb in the garage. He grunted as he rubbed the thick mat of cheesecloth back and forth, whis-

ting "I Believe" along with Frankie Laine's voice on the radio. He finished the turtleback and got into the front seat to wipe the wax off the dashboard. In the house he could hear Hattie typing. Probably Bill Gregory had just meant he had let Hattie have the car wholesale. Sure.

The car looked good with the top down, the chrome and maroon paint shining; Hattie had said it was his car, even if it was in her name. When the music on the radio stopped a voice said heartily, "Is your car *just*—transportation? Why not ride in style, comfort, *and* safety, with no money down, a four-thousand-mile warranty, a week's free trial. Why not see Wild Bill Gregory *today*? You'll say the Crazy Redhead is *giving* cars away. Prices on all cars, *all cars*, slashed up to twenty per cent. Visit one of Wild Bill Gregory's *big* lots, where there are *puh-lenty* of beautiful automobiles, all makes, all models, all body styles, to choose from. You can be sure that the Crazy Redhead has what *you've* been looking for. Now, if you live in—" He snapped the radio off.

Immediately he felt himself flush painfully, because Hattie would have heard the radio, Hattie would have heard him turn it off like that, Hattie would know something was wrong, maybe Hattie would ask him what was wrong. He sat slumped down on the seat, wondering if he'd better turn the radio on again. That would just make it worse. "Sonovabitch," he whispered. "Goddam dirty sonovabitch," and now he had to remember the time Hattie had told him she was going to marry Bill Gregory.

It had been six years ago. He was still in the military academy in Los Angeles, but Hattie had bought her shops and moved to San Diego. About one week-end a month she would come up to see him, and maybe another week-end a month he would take the train down to stay with her. This time she had come to drive him down to San Diego and she had been very gay. He had noticed something different about her hands on the steering wheel of the Buick convertible she had had then, and had realised that she was not wearing his father's gold wedding band. It was the only time he had ever seen her without

it. When he had asked her to she had pushed the Buick up to eighty-five on the long stretch between San Clemente and Oceanside—the fastest he had ever been in a car.

In her apartment in San Diego she had collapsed into the fat yellow overstuffed chair and crossed her feet on the footstool. "Make me a drink, kid," she said. "A little Old Taylor on the rocks." He felt very proud, because making Hattie a drink was something new, and he felt dignified and grown up in his blue uniform.

He brought her the drink, and she said it was a good one. But then she was silent for a long time, drinking the drink and smoking nervously. He sat on the footstool beside her neat crossed ankles and he knew that something was wrong. She wore a black suit and she kept fiddling with a silver necklace she had on. Finally she said, "You don't like Bill Gregory much, do you, kid?"

He didn't say anything, looking down. Once at a party of Hattie's here in San Diego he had seen Bill Gregory put his hand on Hattie's behind. The kind of touch it had been, not a slap or a pat, had almost made him sick.

"Why not?" Hattie said.

"I like him all right."

He looked up. Hattie was staring at him with a strange, bright-eyed look. "All right all right?"

"Sure," he said, and he was very scared.

"I don't expect your Aunt Lorraine would like him much," Hattie said, and it was as though she had known what he was thinking.

He tried to grin, and Hattie grinned crookedly back at him.

"He's a hell of a good guy," she said. "He's a real man. He's a big man. He's got a slew of used-car lots around this town. Wild Bill Gregory, the Used-Car Monarch. The Crazy Red-head. You've heard that corny advertising on the radio, haven't you?"

He nodded. He'd heard it.

"Do you know that he cleared almost a hundred thousand dollars last year?" Hattie said. Now her face was expression-

less, her eyes watched him intently; when he looked down again her hand seemed naked and unfamiliar without the ring. "That's money, Keith," she said. "There are not many men I respect, but I respect Bill. He put up a chunk of cash to help me go into business down here—did you know that?"

He shook his head.

"Have you figured out what I'm getting at, kid?"

He shook his head again, but he knew.

"Bill's asked me to marry him."

He bit his lip until it felt as though his teeth were going to go on through. Hattie's face was drawn but blank, her eyes still had the strange brightness. They narrowed a little, and again it was as though she knew what he was thinking, and she said, "Honey, I'm going to leave it up to you."

He felt the tears starting. "No, Hattie," he whispered. "Don't, Hattie." He leaned forward until his face was pressed against her black skirt. "Please!" he begged. "You don't have to, Hattie! See, I'm almost grown up. You just support me till I—till I get finished with school, and then I'll get a job and I'll make as much as he does, and I'll— More!" he cried. "Mother, listen—" It had been awful. Now it had got to be like a big sore in his memory that had scabbed over but broke open every once in a while—what a horrible, crummy, rotten, crying-around schnook he had been.

Finally Hattie had just said, "Okay," and got up abruptly. She picked up her glass and moved away, her back to him. He saw her shrug her shoulders. She stood there with one hand on her hip, the narrow hip cocked, while she took a long drink.

He saw that she was looking at herself in the gilt-edged mirror over the mantel, but from where he still knelt he couldn't see the reflection of her face. "Well, you dealt it, smart lady," he heard her whisper. She drained the liquor in her glass. Without turning toward him she said, "Beat it to your room for a while, will you, kid?"

For a while after that he had managed to forget the whole thing, although he had been relieved when Bill Gregory had gotten married. He had felt bad sometimes because ever since

he had come out to California to be with Hattie, when he was eleven, it had been so fine, and she'd been fine and not like so many other mothers who were always bitching about everything, not treating him as though he were a little kid and letting him have his way about things when she saw he had good reasons—like the next fall when he had wanted to leave the military academy and she had sent him to the Phillips School instead. But when she had asked him if *she* could do something he had acted like that. Yet he couldn't have stood it to have her married to Bill Gregory, and he knew she couldn't have stood it. He had acted the way he had to, he had really been so miserably ashamed only because of the way he had achieved the victory. But then Bill Gregory had started coming around again. And Bill Gregory had given Hattie his car! It didn't make sense. But maybe it did, maybe Hattie had really wanted to marry him, maybe she had always been in love with him, maybe— But Bill Gregory was such a rotten guy, and Hattie couldn't help knowing it.

He felt torn apart by the effort not to blame Hattie for any of it, for anything, not to— He shook his head violently, felt the familiar shame again, and turned to it almost gratefully. What the hell kind of a guy was he, feeling all that over again and still crying and whining and bitching around inside, when he was eighteen now and would be a sophomore at Cal next year, had been first team Frosh basketball this year and would play in varsity games next year maybe, and had made the Fee-Gee house and—

"Grow up!" he whispered furiously and went back to work on the dashboard. He messed around a little more until he was sure he'd got hold of himself, then switched off the garage light and went inside.

Hattie was still sitting at her desk, a cigarette tilted down out of the corner of her mouth. On the desk with the typewriter were piles of fashion magazines, a thick ledger, a triple-decker check case, the calfskin briefcase he had sent her for Christmas, and a stack of envelopes.

"Finished?" she said with a sharp glance at him through her

glasses. "How about licking these flaps for me?"

"Sure." He took the stack of envelopes from her and sat down on the sofa. Hattie resumed her typing, pecking away fast and hard. She tore the sheet of paper out with a screech, cranked another in. As he licked the gummed flaps and sealed the letters he gazed out the black window at the wavering phosphorescent line of surf, and, higher on the glass, the distant small red light of a fishing boat.

Hattie jerked the paper out of the typewriter, signed it, folded it into an envelope, and sailed the envelope over onto his lap. "I'm finished too," she said, rose, and went out into the kitchen with quick steps. He heard the rattle of a pot on the stove.

He had just finished sealing the last envelope when she came back with two cups of coffee. "I guess you're the fastest coffee-maker in the world," he said.

She sat down beside him and crossed her legs. She had no lipstick on now, and her lips were almost the same even tan as the rest of her face. She had taken off her glasses. "Want to run those letters down to catch the nine-fifty train for me?" she said.

"Sure." He sipped his coffee, trying not to make a face. He liked cream and sugar, but when he was with Hattie he always took coffee black, as she did.

"Do you feel like a little serious talking, Keith?"

He felt his heart swell and rise to beat at the base of his throat.

"I don't mean about your grades," Hattie said. "I guess we rode that into the ground before, haven't we?"

He tried to grin. Out of the corners of his eyes he watched her sip her coffee; her lashes made soft shadows on her cheeks. He felt as though he were holding his breath.

"I guess we don't know each other very well," Hattie said in a flat voice. "That is, I think I know you, but I don't think you know me very well." She made an uncertain motion toward him with her free hand. "And probably you think just the opposite."



She stopped and sipped her coffee again. "Well," she said, "what I'm trying to say is pretty mixed up, but it seems to me there's a time when a mother's relationship with her brat ought to change. I mean—well, when you were a kid I was your mother. Period. Not a very available one, I know, but I was doing the best I could."

When he started to speak she shook her head at him, grimacing, and continued, "Now you're eighteen, and I think our relationship has to start shifting gears somewhere along in here. I've got to start looking at you as a man, not as my boy. And you have to quit looking at me as just your mother. You've got to see that I'm a person, a woman, an old lady, not just *your* old lady."

"Old lady?" he said. "Nuts, old lady."

She gave him a cool, appraising look, clicking a fingernail against the side of her cup. "Maybe we're friends now," she said. "I think we are in a way. But I want a shift towards our being more friends than mother and son. Otherwise the thing goes on past where it should, and finally you hear things about me or find out I've got feet of clay and bang, you cross me off. And that would hurt me a lot more than I like to think about."

"Aw, Hattie," he started, but again stopped as her eyes flickered toward him, then away.

She went on quickly. "What I mean is, understanding each other and accepting each other as we are. I know you have to make mistakes to learn about things, and you have to realize I've made my mistakes too. If you can get to accept me in an adult way, then it's going to be easier for me to accept you as an adult. Which I have to do. Do you see, Keith?"

"Sure," he said, nodding. He was relieved at the tack she had taken. As he lit her cigarette for her he thought about Mary-Lynn in the drugstore this afternoon touching Bill Gregory's hand, and suddenly something inside him, which had been so tightly held, slipped for a moment.

He sat there, fighting it, and Hattie was silent for a long time, smoking with quick, nervous puffs. He saw her look at her wristwatch. "Half-past," she said. "Well, I want to jump on

this while we've got it down. Things like—oh, you and I are at a party and some jerk tells a dirty story. I've seen you die of embarrassment. But I know perfectly well that you kids tell dirty stories around the frat house. And you ought to know that in my business I see a good many salesmen and I've heard just about all of them myself. Next time it happens, let's not get all embarrassed for each other. I don't want to have to suffer because my lily-white son is being corrupted. Because I know you're not lily-white. And you have to start—start realizing I'm not lily-white either."

She made the nervous gesture toward him with her hand again. She gave him a trace of her hard, crooked grin. "And that time last summer when you came in from a date with your girl friend and I was up late, working. You couldn't get across the room fast enough, you were so afraid I'd see lipstick all over your face like you'd been eating watermelon. Did you want me to think you'd never kissed a girl? I'd really worry if you hadn't. Did you think I'd never—" She stopped and slapped her hands together. "Well—well, if you take your bobby-soxers up in the hills and eat all their lipstick up and—well—whatever. Just so you're not fool enough to get them pregnant, that's—"

She stopped, and he knew she was as embarrassed as he was. Then that seemed funny, because of what she'd just said about dirty jokes, and he relaxed and laughed. Hattie laughed too.

"See?" she said. "But, damn it. I mean it. It's all part of life. I accept it, and you have to be adult enough to accept it too. I want you to try, Keith."

He nodded jerkily, but now he wanted to get out of here and take the letters to the train before she said anything more.

"Have you understood what I've been trying to say? I'm afraid you—I'm afraid kids are apt to think their mothers are pretty perfect. I'm not. I don't want you to think that I am. You have to—"

"I'll tell you what," he said with false heartiness. "Next good joke I hear I'll come tell you. Okay?"

"Wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

He stared back at her, still trying to grin, but the tight, long-practised inner grip had slipped again and the sick rage was loosed. "Well, if I get any girls pregnant I'll let you know," he said, and his voice sounded very thick.

Hattie gazed at him with one eyebrow raised, one corner of her mouth turned down.

He got up. "Well, I guess I'd better get those letters down to the train."

"Give your old lady a kiss before you go."

But he couldn't, he knew he couldn't now. He had to get out of here and away, and get himself straightened out. He couldn't kiss her. "Oh, not me," he said. "I only kiss girls with lots of lipstick on, you know." He tried once more to grin at her, then swung around. Gripping the letters tightly, he hurried out.

He backed his car out of the garage. He was shivering. The headlights sprayed pale and cold over the dark street as he started out for the station. He drove slowly, trying to find some music on the radio, trying to get control of himself, and he was worried that Hattie had sensed something was wrong when he had taken off like that. He passed Bill Gregory's long, low house with the monster TV aerial on the roof. The house was dark, the garage open. Neither Bill Gregory's Cadillac nor Mrs. Gregory's MG was there; but on the lawn was some kind of big toy car. The year after Hattie had come to Mardios Beach, Bill Gregory had moved here too; even that. God-dam bastard, why the hell would he say a thing like that about his, Keith's, car? He switched off the radio, thrust down hard on the accelerator, and the car leaped ahead.

He thought of Hattie eating him out last night about his grades; well, he might as well fluff off next year and take solid Fs and get drafted and then—*Stop it!* and Hattie talking to him about going on to law school. Well, she could—*Stop it!* He remembered that day when he was ten and the letter had come to Aunt Lorraine, saying that she was to put him on the plane for Los Angeles, and she had asked him to write Hattie

and say that he didn't want to come, and his grandmother looking at him with her watery old eyes behind the thick glasses and saying was he sure he wanted to go, was he sure? And then Aunt Lorraine, with her mouth tight and lined at the corners, saying that Hattie didn't really want him to come, that he would be a burden to her, that she didn't have time for him with her job and her friends. The way she'd said "friends"—*He had to stop this!*

When he had parked in the station and taken the letters in to the mail guy, the train chuffed around the curve and squealed to a stop. It blocked the street, and he could not get out of the station until it had gone. He sat gazing out the windshield past the north-heading engine toward Bill Gregory's house far down Ocean Avenue. He could not pick it out from here, in the darkness. "He's a real man," Hattie had said. The train began pulling out of the station with a labouring, panting sound. "Adult," he said aloud, scornfully, angrily, but at the same time as though to remind himself that he wasn't being adult. Adult—

The twin red lights at the end of the train flickered out of sight, but he did not drive on. He sat slumped down in his seat; it was like trying to freeze the ball when there were too many snatching hands and the ball too slippery with his own sweat. He let himself release it, and knew it was forever. It surprised him that he was not more shocked to know, for now he did know. But of course he had known it already, except that he had never thought about it, never let himself think about it. Never, with Hattie, or looking at her picture on his dresser, or reading one of her weekly letters, or just thinking about her, had it been possible to let his mind sneak into that area. Well, why not? something in him cried defensively, He'd read novels, hadn't he? It was all right in books, wasn't it, when things were like that? He had thought it was pretty sophisticated last summer about Dick Bannerman and that Mrs. Hanson, hadn't he?

He leaned slowly forward until his forehead was pressed against the hard, cold, curved plastic of the steering wheel. But not your own mother. Not Hattie, who was like the best, only

the best, of all the clean, tan, beautiful girls, all of them rolled into one and then the cream skimmed off, which was Hattie; that, only a little older, but, older, wiser, cleverer, more attractive, adult. He groaned and thought of what was so fine and exciting on the seat of the convertible by moonlight, all clothed and chaste and clean; and the other, shackled-up in bed. He groaned again.

Bill Gregory; he felt destroyed.

Numbly he started the car that Bill Gregory had given Hattie and drove out of the station. He couldn't go home now; he turned up California Street away from the beach, and in front of the Jacaranda Bar saw Dick Bannerman's red Chevie pickup truck parked. He jumped on the brakes and pulled to the curb ahead of it. He had to talk to Dick. And maybe there would be no one but the regulars in the Jac, and Ernie might let him have a drink. Have a drink and talk to Dick, and maybe somehow it would work out so it wasn't true, or so that it didn't matter. He told himself it didn't matter, it didn't matter, except that it had been Bill Gregory—but he knew he could never force it from his mind again. *Oh, damn you, Hattie*, he thought, and could still be shocked at himself for thinking it.

He crossed the sidewalk and stepped inside the swinging door. The Jacaranda was very small. Two couples in sports clothes sat in one of the three dark wood booths, and all but one of the stools at the bar were occupied. Instead of Ernie, who was a good friend of Hattie's, a short, sleek-haired Mexican stood behind the bar, wiping glasses and talking to a woman in a barebacked dress who leaned across the counter toward him.

He saw Dick Bannerman sitting in the end booth, facing away from him, smoking his pipe.

The bartender glanced up at him and frowned, and, seeing a fragment of his reflection in the mirror behind the bar, he remembered that he had on only his Levis and a beat-up old sweater with the sleeves chopped off. He started to retreat, and then he saw Bill Gregory.

Bill Gregory swung around toward him. "Hi, boy!" he called

loudly, beckoning.

He felt everyone looking at him. He saw Dick Bannerman glance around and averted his eyes. He backed up a step.

"Hey, come on over!" Bill Gregory said, and all at once he knew he had to go over there to Bill Gregory and talk to Bill Gregory as though nothing had happened, and be adult. He had to do it now.

He said, "Hi, Bill," and his face felt like paper crumpling as he tried to grin. He moved forward, stooping a little, feeling very tall and awkward. Bill Gregory looked him hard in the face. He, Keith, put out his hand, and Bill Gregory wrung it and seemed suddenly pleased, grinning broadly, his square teeth so white and the gold rim around one of the front ones, his mouth like a chrome grille in the light.

"I blow too—" Bill muttered, stopped, grinned again. "How about moving it over?" he said to the couple next to him. They moved over. "Park it," Bill Gregory said and released his hand.

He sat down on the stool and put his hands on the bar. The bartender was scowling. Big Man, Hattie had said, but she wouldn't have said that to him if it meant to her what it meant when they said it in the locker room, for Christ's sake! He looked down at his hands then forced himself to look up at Bill Gregory. "Well, I thought I'd come up here and see if anybody I knew was here," he said. "Say hello, you know. You, or Dick Bannerman, or Ernie, or anybody."

Bill looked at him with a sideways tilt to his head that made him resemble a freckled, balding lizard. He had freckled lips. He still wore the loud red and brown jacket. It had leather buttons. Bill Gregory slapped him on the shoulder and suddenly, in his imagination, he heard Bill Gregory telling him a dirty story, a filthy story, and he knew he wouldn't be able to stand it.

"Only saw you sitting down this afternoon," Bill Gregory said. "My God, you get about six inches taller every time I see you. What're you now, six four?"

"Six three," he said and cleared his throat.

"Real tall boy," Bill Gregory said to the fat man next to

him. "A real guy too. That's what I told that kid of mine—if you don't eat your dinner, how the hell do you expect to grow up to be six feet four and play basketball in college like Hattie's boy?" He sounded pretty drunk. "Keith's Hattie Rankin's boy," he said to the fat man.

He didn't hear the fat man's name as he leaned across Bill Gregory to shake hands. "Grows a foot every time I see him," Bill Gregory was saying. "Plays a hell of a lot of basketball up at Cal."

He almost said he only played on the Frosh.

"Looks like he ought to be able to," the fat man said.

"Warren and I just got our wallets trimmed in a poker game," Bill Gregory said. "Bunch of commandos got into me for eight hundred bucks. What'd they tag you for, Warren?"

"Enough. That's too high-powered a game for me."

"I'm one hell of a poker player when I'm winning," Bill Gregory said, shaking his head. "But how I hate to lose! No limit game," he said in explanation and shook his head again. The buttons on his jacket were plaited leather balls, large and shiny.

"Hello, Keith," a voice said, and he looked up to see, in the mirror, Dick Banner. An standing at the bar. The bartender was refilling his glass, and Dick had put a fifty-cent piece down.

"Hi," he said and watched Dick go back to his booth.

"You kids ever get into any no-limit poker games up at the university, don't do it," Bill Gregory said. "How's your mother, Keith? We just about stopped by tonight. I was really feeling lousy about everything. Went home to get my wife to cook us some ham and eggs, but she's not around. Probably catting around at some bar somewhere, picking up Marines." One of his eyelids flickered.

The fat man laughed comfortably and sucked on the orange slice from his old-fashioned.

He, Keith, tried to grin back at Bill Gregory, but he knew it was no good. He couldn't do this.

"Don't get married, don't get into no-limit poker games," Bill Gregory went on. "Advice I'm going to give Billy when

he's your age. Don't drink cheap liquor either. Your mother still drinks Old Taylor, doesn't she? Where the hell's that bartender?"

The bartender moved down toward them. "I've been watching you sexing up that bar kitten," Bill whispered to the bartender and turned to wink at him, Keith. "Want you to cut that stuff out. Now, I want you to buy my tall pal here a drink on account he's got the nicest damn mother in the country. What'll you have, Keith?"

"Bourbon on the rocks," he said.

The bartender started to turn toward the bottles standing in neat rows before the mirror, then turned back. His face was a dark red. "Have to ask you if you're twenty-one."

"Twenty-one last month," he said hoarsely.

"Have to ask to see your driver's licence or something. You got a draft card?"

Bill Gregory slammed his hand down on the bar. "What the hell, didn't you hear him say he was twenty-one last month? Can't you tell the men from the boys? Now get going and make this free, white, twenty-one-year-old a-dult a drink!"

He, Keith, fumbled for his wallet, but he didn't take it out of his pocket. In the mirror he could see Dick Bannerman in the last booth lighting his pipe. His cheeks felt on fire; he was afraid to look anywhere for fear of meeting someone's eyes.

The bartender was shaking his head stubbornly. "They catch me serving minors in here, they'll shut this place down."

"Ernie used to serve me last summer," he said loudly. "Where's Ernie? He'll tell you—" He had just told the bartender he was twenty-one last month. He backed off his stool and stood up very straight. Almost frantically he wished that this evening were only some horrible piece of a dream—all of it—and that now he would wake up and get up to get a drink of water and eat an orange and go back to bed. Why the hell had he ever come in here? Goddam loud mouth bastard! *Oh, damn you, Hattie!*

"Ernie's sick," the bartender was saying. "I'll have to see your—"



"Listen!" Bill Gregory got to his feet and leaned way over the bar toward the bartender. "The liquor-control boys happen by, which they won't, I'll square any tag you get and don't think I can't do it. How's that? I can do it. Tell this clunk if I can fix it or not, Warren."

"He can do it, Manuel," the fat man said.

He tried to say, "I don't want a drink," but the words did not come out. Sonovabitch, sonovabitch, goddam sonovabitch with the goddam plaited leather balls on his jacket. "Got to go," he said aloud. Go where? He couldn't look at Bill Gregory. "I guess I didn't want anything anyway." He turned toward the door, and met Dick Bannerman's eyes; Dick was twisting around with one arm in a brown corduroy sleeve braced up on the side of the booth, his face anxious and pitying and then instantly blank.

"Hey, wait, kid!" Bill Gregory called after him. "He's making it!"

But he stumbled outside into the cool empty night. He ran to his car, which was not his car, and got in and punched the starter. As he raced in humiliation and despair up California Street and across the highway he wondered if he would even have stopped had the traffic light been red against him.

## Friday 3

BEA GREGORY drove slowly home from the movie in Crown Bay, the next little town to the north of Mardios Beach. A few speeding cars chased past her on the highway with a glare of headlights in the rear-view mirror of the little MG, a whack of harsh sound, then the red embers of tail-lights fading away ahead. She came into Mardios and turned down toward the

beach past the Jacaranda Bar and the brightly lit bulk of the hotel. She could see the moon on the ocean now, and the faint red light at the end of Mardios pier. She turned again, the car jerking with too little power in high gear, but now she was home, now, inescapably, she had returned to Bill's new house on the beach with a lamp glowing through the living-room window and the television antenna glittering for a moment in her headlights, and the dark shape of Bill's Cadillac blocking the driveway so that she had to park at the curb.

She sat staring at the Cadillac, which meant that Bill was home, at the light in the living room, which meant he was probably waiting up for her, and felt all at once too tired to slide out of the little car, walk up the drive, enter the house. Bill had come home early this afternoon, while she was still at the beach, and had left again without any word to Mrs. Haver, the housekeeper. Which meant, probably, that she should have been at home when he arrived. She gathered up her gloves and purse and got out. She looked at the little car Bill had had made for Billy as she moved up the drive. Billy loved the little car. Tonight before his bedtime she had pushed him along the sidewalk in it, but it was too heavy it was hard for her, and it was almost impossible for Billy to move it with his feet while sitting in it. There were no pedals.

On the porch she shivered in the wind off the ocean, and in the silence the slow, restrained hushing of the waves on the beach was very loud. Through the window, she could see Bill cradled in the contour chair before the TV, his bare feet propped up almost as high as his head. He was naked except for blue silk shorts, and at first she thought he was asleep, but as she watched he raised his head a little, raised the glass in his hand to drink, rubbed his other hand over the hairs on his bare chest. Gray and white shapes on the TV screen bobbed and jerked in antic motion. Through the window the room looked like something from a cover of *Sunset* or *Better Homes and Gardens*, the foam rubber and wrought iron and Swedish modern furniture was all expensive and probably beautiful, but it was all just part of a magazine cover. She had never felt any

attachment for any of it, or for the house. When they had sold their house on Point Loma to move up here and had sold every bit of furniture with it, it had been no wrench to her. It had only been like moving from one furnished rented house to another. She longed for her father's old house in Silverlake in Los Angeles, with its dark, heavy Victorian furniture; that had been a home. This seemed only a kind of display window. She stared in the window at her husband, in at her life.

When she pushed the door open and entered Bill sat up and leaned forward to switch off the TV. Without turning toward her he said, "Where you been?"

"I went to the show in Crown Bay." She put down her purse and gloves, untied the scarf that covered her hair. She wondered how drunk he was.

"I got rung in on a poker game earlier," Bill said. He sat slumped, staring at the lifeless TV screen. Then he swung around toward her accusingly. "I checked out and came home about an hour or so ago. But no wife. So I went up to the Jacaranda."

"You must have been losing."

"Oh sure." He gazed at her steadily, hostilely, over the top of his glass, his heavy freckled, red-haired hand brushing up and down over his chest. "Yeah, I've been losing all night. A lousy night, hon. I've been doing some thinking."

"Have you, Bill?" she said and sat down on the arm of a chair, facing him across the room.

"Where you been, hon?"

"I told you. I went to the show."

"What show?"

"*Ivanhoe*."

"Oh yeah. About knights, somebody said."

"Yes, it was about knights."

"I've been thinking, hon," Bill said. "We ought to stay home, knights." He grinned stiffly at her. "You know, I was losing over at Marty's but I didn't stay to make it back. I came home to see my wife. But you weren't here. The little wife who wasn't there."

"What do you expect me to do, Bill? Do you want—"

He waved a hand at her, and she stopped. He rubbed his hand over his forehead. "Cut it out," he said. "I'm not getting on you about it. Christ, what a crummy night I've had. Everything. Bea, we're in a hell of a shape, do you know it?"

She didn't answer.

"What the hell's gone wrong?" Bill said. "I don't know what the hell's gone wrong."

She sat there dumbly. She saw his face tighten.

"What's the matter, don't want to talk to me?"

"It's not that. I—"

"I wish I knew what the hell was the matter with you," Bill said through his teeth.

"Is it my fault?"

"Well, goddam it, you come in here looking like you can't stand the sight of me, and I try to talk to you about something serious and you wish you were in bed instead. And not with me either." He raised his glass and took a long drink; he wiped his mouth. "You know what I thought? I thought maybe you just weren't at the show like Haver said. I thought maybe you were up at Bannerman's, sacked in with Bannerman." He stared at her, and she felt a flash of unreasoning fright. "But you wouldn't do that, would you?" he said.

She shook her head.

"Anyway, Bannerman showed up at the Jac. Or maybe he just got sick of it early and sent you home, uh?"

She tried not to let the fright and revulsion show. She wondered what had made him think of Richard. But whether it was true or not, just because he had thought of it and felt troubled about it, he could punish her for it, cruelly and lastingly. She managed a smile as she picked up her purse and hunted through it till she found the bent pink stub of her movie ticket. She went over to him and held out the stub.

He didn't look at it. He closed his eyes insolently as he finished the liquor in his glass. He dropped the glass to the carpet beside his chair. She retreated and sat down again.

Bill said, "Bea, what the hell's the matter with us?" His voice

was almost pleading.

"I don't know, Bill," she said. She felt the tears close as she watched his hand brushing over his chest.

"Everything we do, it ends up in a bitch. Or your freezing on me. Or— What the hell's gone so wrong?"

She just shook her head.

He was silent for a long time. Then he said, "Well, I know. You're no damn good. Are you?"

She shook her head again. She did not particularly think about what he had just said, she did not accept it now, from him, as she did accept it sometimes when she considered herself. She did not try to think what was wrong with them now, remembering with the old, sick, weak, established wonder when she had met him, at a party in Hollywood. She had left the man she had come with and let Bill drive her home. It had not been the kind of thing she did, but it had been romantic and exciting. The next weekend they had spent together in Palm Springs, which had not been the kind of thing she did either. She had thought she was crazy in love with him, and it had been so wonderful to be crazy, to be lifted out of herself at last. She was flattered that he, who was so different from any of the other people she knew, should be interested in her, passionate about her, so determined. Because he had been so unlike the others; because he was a self-made man and there was no family in the background, because he was self-confident, hard, experienced, assertive, smart instead of intelligent, vital, hard-working and hard-playing; because she had thought him completely charming, because he was masterful, because he had been able to make her laugh, make her feel jealous about other women. Because of a great complex of emotions, a great many of which she never let herself consider. And it had all vanished or turned to ugliness so very quickly.

He knew it too, had known it as soon and as long as she had, but the knowledge only seemed to make him furious. He had married her, he had said, because he'd had a fight with Hattie Rankin. He had told her that on many nights like this one. Probably he would tell her again tonight.

"What good are you, Bea?" he said in a thick voice.

"You've already told me. I'm no good."

"I sure got stuck when I married you, didn't I? I sure got stuck on that deal."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so loudly, Bill."

"Talk as goddam loud as I feel like. My house. All paid for. Built it for you, didn't I? What a screwing I've taken. Right down the line."

"Yes," she said, holding her head high, trying to smile, to appear unconcerned. "Yes, you've told me. Everything's yours and bought and paid for. But I wish you wouldn't wake our son yelling that I'm no good."

"Our son," Bill said. His face contorted again, fiercely. He turned his head slowly from side to side. "Just like everything else," he said. "Look at him! Gone sour like everything else. You're even no lousy good as a mother. Can't even spend any time home with your kid. Come here."

She felt the flood of self-pity rise, become exhaustion, cover her and suck her down. She knew she could not get up and go over to him; it was a simple physical impossibility, as though he had demanded that she fly for him.

"Come here!"

"Shhhhhhh!" she whispered, but if she didn't go to him he would yell and wake Billy. The effort drained her strength.

Grinning with a kind of violent and furious shame, he pulled her down on his lap and leaned back in the contour chair. Her cheek against his hairy chest, she could hear his heart beating. She waited there, passive, almost relaxed, her eyes open and gazing at the broad dark squares of the windows. There was nothing outside them; they were only mirrors reflecting the room, reflecting Bill and herself.

"You know what it's like?" Bill said loudly. "It's like having a tray of ice cubes dumped in your lap."

"I'm sorry, Bill," she whispered, and her voice broke. She had tried at first to be as he had wanted her to be. She had tried again when she was so grateful to him for letting her have Billy, the only time she could remember having her wish when

it conflicted with his. Still, once in a while she tried, as once in a while she had to fall back on her last defence, which was the thought that he was cheap, ill-bred, not worthy of her. But it was not so simple as that; it was that she was unequipped for him by any trait of instinct, experience, or background. They belonged to different breeds.

"Listen, Bea," Bill said in a low voice, husky, urgent. "Bea, listen. What the hell? Bea—"

She heard Billy muttering in the bedroom, down the dark hall.

"Damn!" Bill said.

Billy cried, "Mommy?"

She tried to pull away, to go to Billy, but Bill's arms tightened around her and her face was pressed painfully against his chest.

"Mother?" Billy cried.

She heard his footsteps padding in the hallway.

"Hi, kid," Bill said. "Mommy and Daddy are having a little talk. Grab a chair and—"

She dug her fingernails into his arm, whispering, "Let me go!" He released her. She got to her feet and moved quickly over to where Billy was standing in his sleepers, his big-eyed narrow-chinned little face blank with sleep. Watching him pouting and rubbing his eyes, she felt her heart turn over with a gently stretching sensation. Quickly she stooped to pick him up. He put his arms around her neck.

His lips shaped words. Is it morning? she read on his lips. It was an effort not to help him as he started the sentence again. Finally he said it aloud. "Is it morning, Mommy?"

"No, darling, it's very late. I'm sorry we woke you up."

"Mother, can I go coast down the hill in the mmmmm-morning?"

"We'll see, darling. But that's such a bad corner at the bottom. It's hard to see the big cars coming, and your car doesn't have brakes like Daddy's and mine."

"You've really got to make a chicken out of him, don't you?" Bill said.

She smiled at Billy, who yawned. His breath was warm and had a warm, almost sweet smell. There were crumbs of sleep in the corners of his eyes. His lips moved, practising. "Where did Ddd-daddy ggg—"

"Played some poker, kid," Bill interrupted. "Lost eight hundred bucks."

Billy stared over her shoulder at Bill, frowning delicately. Then he yawned again. She squeezed him tightly against her, against her breasts where she had fed him. What the hell do you want to do that for? Bill had said. I don't want a wife with old beat-up tits like a hound's ears.

"You're going back to bed," she said to Billy. "First thing in the morning we'll go down to the beach with your shovel and pail. Maybe we'll take your new car along. Would you like that?"

"I don't want to go to bed."

"But it's so late, darling," she said.

He began to cry softly.

Bill said, "Damn!" again, and she tried to comfort Billy so that he wouldn't cry any more, almost desperately whispering into his ear and patting his back, carrying her son down the hall to his room. She could hear Mrs. Haver's slow, steady snoring from her bedroom. When Billy was quiet in her arms she laid him down in the new youth bed and covered him up. Her back ached as she straightened. He was very heavy for her now, although he was only four, and small for four. "Good night, darling," she whispered.

He didn't answer, sighing as he turned over and curled up with his knees against his chest.

"Bea?" Bill called from the living room.

She turned off the lights and started to close the door. "I can't see!" Billy said and began to cry again.

She went back inside, turned on the night light, kissed him, and said good night again. She was crying too as she went back down the Hall. Bill had risen. She saw his face twist and darken.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" he said. "You can always get out of



it by bawling, can't you?"

"I don't want to get out of anything, Bill," she said. Oh, God, she said to herself, I don't want to get out of anything, not anything, I just want—"I guess I'll go drink a glass of milk before we go to bed," she said to Bill.

She went into the kitchen and drank a glass of milk and carefully rinsed out the glass and put it upside down on the sink to drain. When she went back into the living room Bill was lying face down on the couch, his face buried in the crook of his arm, his other arm hanging over the side and the clenched fist rising and falling, slowly, steadily, hitting against the floor.



**SATURDAY**



# Saturday 1

WHEN Richard Bannerman woke, long thin lines of sunlight were streaming in across his bed through the venetian blinds. He did not move, staring up at the dusty glass fixture in the centre of the plaster ceiling and thinking of nothing at all, except that it was Saturday, his crew would not be working to-day, so there was no necessity for getting up immediately.

But he swung himself out of bed, stripped off his pyjama top, and rolled the bar bell out of the corner. Each thick red disk was marked in raised figures: 50 lbs. The scored bar was cold in his hands. He lifted it slowly to his waist, snapped it more quickly up under his chin, let it down, lifted, snapped, let it down—two, three, four, five. He felt the sweat starting, and his mind, which was always paralysed when he awoke, began to operate a little. He thought, depressingly, of Keith Rankin last night, felt an emphatic shame and embarrassment for Keith, whom he'd got to be good friends with last summer, and who seemed to him a youngster with sense and sensibility more than the average, which average, in Southern California this year, seemed to turn on queer haircuts and blondined effects, bop-talk, and, according to the papers at least, marijuana parties. Ten, eleven, twelve; his body felt slick and cool with sweat now, and he watched with pride—amused at his pride—the muscles of his arms and belly knot and ripple. The situation, of course, had been much more complicated than the boy's embarrassment at not being served a drink and at being caught in a lie. He had often wondered if Keith knew what the situation was, or had been, between his mother and Bill Gregory: if he didn't know, how he was able to keep himself from knowing; if he did know, how he had worked it out with himself. Last night had been at least a test of manhood, where Keith's was found not to stack up to Bill Gregory's on the arbitrary

level of not being man enough to be given a drink. And more that that—But he must not mix Keith's feelings with his own, which were probably as complicated and ambiguous. Bill Gregory struck him as a domineering, overconfident, and rather lonely boor, who, regrettably enough, lived in Mardios, which he, Richard Bannerman, loved; but he also had to view him, symbolically and broodingly, as the last of the go-getting, predatory pioneers, who, with the continent to its Western rim all conquered and unresisting, had turned to prey on their fellow men. In this case, on their slavery to the Californian opium of the automobile.

Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—lift, snap, drop. He rested at twenty-five. Breathing heavily, he wiped his hands on his pyjama bottoms, then started in on the second twenty-five hundred pounds of his daily stint, which, on the one hand, had a pleasingly sisyphean aspect. The trouble was, he thought, that he read vast meanings into meaningless actions and situations. He was what the right-wing columnists liked to call, contemptuously, a "bleeding heart." He was president and, as far as he knew, sole member of the Mardios Beach chapter of the bleeding hearts. Already he had hewn out of the situation in the Jacaranda Bar last night a staggering load of moral complexities, pitying Keith, who had probably forgotten it already, and pitying Hattie, who, if there were to be any kind of fracas between Bill Gregory and Keith, would be trampled badly. He liked Hattie as he liked Keith, although he condemned her for her bad taste and judgment in engaging in what had evidently been a long-term affair with Gregory. But she was a good friend, the kind of woman you could consider a friend without feeling called upon to carry the relationship further, and probably she was perfectly capable of dealing with any situation arising out of last night's contretemps. If any situation, that is, did arise.

He rolled the bar bell back into the corner and looked at the clock on the dresser: five minutes past eight. Breakfast, the post office, and then a swim. He ate half a grapefruit while his eggs were frying, and then consumed the greasy, tough product

of his cookery between two pieces of bread, thinking, as he usually did after preparing a meal himself, of his divorced wife. Despite all her faults, Betty had been a marvellous cook. Now, married to an impressive collection of Texas oil leases, she probably didn't have to cook, which was too bad.

Carrying his swim fins, wearing his trunks, a towel around his neck, he went outside. He drove his pickup truck down California Street in the bright sun, stopping for the red light where California Street was intersected by the highway. Traffic rushed across in front of him with its drum and whine and stink of exhaust fumes. The highway cut Mardios in two; it was six lanes here, the black asphalt lined with sharply etched white, a kind of channelled and permanent juggernaut that each year exacted its computable toll of lives.

Across Highway 101, on the right-hand corner, was the Mardios Hotel, its pink stucco ugliness softened by the erupting fronds of palm trees. On the far left corner was the drugstore, next to it the liquor store, then the concrete-block supermarket, the variety store, the real-estate office, and the Shell station. Facing them across the highway were the huge, self-service gas station ("Save 5c. per gal."), the austere and cool Episcopalian church set far back along the eucalyptus trees, the Texaco and Standard stations. A block farther down was the white-frame Catholic church with its greenish, weathered, three-quarter-sized statue of Christ holding raised arms out toward the highway.

The traffic light changed to green, the cross-current of cars and trucks ground to an impatient stop for him, the only one waiting at the signal. Grinning a little at this triumph of the individual, he rattled on across the highway, past the hotel which was almost empty still because the summer season would not start for another few weeks, past the Jacaranda Bar, and stopped at the post office. As usual, except on the first of the month, there was no mail for him. He drove around the block and stopped to look at the house he was building. The framing was almost finished, and in the sun the stud walls of two-by-fours looked pleasingly light-coloured and geometrical. The

house was a small one, two bedrooms, one bath, a large fireplace, and considerable window area; it was the size he had found to be most in demand. He had also built the houses on either side of it, one with a hipped roof, the other with a flat roof, both of stained boards and bats, as this one would be. They looked inexpensive but not cheap. He had been able to build the others for less than ten thousand, including the lot, and clear two or three thousand on the sale. Then buy another lot, get another loan, build another house; he could finish about three a year and had not as yet had any trouble selling them, because he didn't ask what the traffic might bear. But he knew his houses were not looked upon with favour by members of the higher-income brackets of Mardios Beach—for one, by retired Colonel Kinney, who lived across the street.

Completed, this would be the tenth house he had built, and some celebration would be called for. When he had solemnly come to the conclusion, five years ago, that there was no way in which he could help save, or even help, the world, he had decided that all there was to do was tend his own small knitting as best he could. In the face of the anger of his wife, the despair of his mother, and the unhappy puzzlement of his father, he had taken a job as a truck driver—truck dispatching and maintenance, which he had learned as a Motor transport officer in the Army, being the only trade he knew. He supposed now that he had also wanted to shock his family. He had found the work and the companionship grindingly dull, but he had hung onto the job for more than a year, while, with his savings and in his spare time, he had worked like a dog to build himself and his wife a house. He had done all the work himself, except for the plumbing and electrical layouts. When his wife left him he had more time to work on the house, although the reason for it had been taken away. He had sold it at what seemed to him then an enormous profit, and, with that, had decided to become a builder. He had moved to Mardios, where his family had spent summers when he was a boy, and had gone into business. He had been surprised to find that he was a good builder, to realize presently that he was a minor success. Now his tenth



house was under way, his tenth cellarless, atticless, California box for living in. Stationary house trailers, he called them when he was scoffing at himself. But he was proud of himself and of them. It was an honourable trade, and they were good sturdy houses.

Colonel Kinney appeared, dragging a green plastic hose to water his rosebushes. Colonel Kinney regarded him with a cold eye as he drove on, and looked away as he waved. Cut dead; probably Colonel Kinney was terrified that he would sell one of his houses to a Jewish family.

He stopped in the parking lot above the beach and sat staring out at the ocean. He was always a little embarrassed at the emotion he felt, looking at the ocean here. The cliffs were not high in Mardios Beach, the ocean was not wild and did not crash spectacularly over rocks, the pier was rickety and old. The ocean was very calm this morning, with early-morning waves breaking in fragile lines out beyond the end of the pier. The beach was littered with kelp thrown up by the high tide. There was no one in sight. He sat gazing at the deserted beach and breathing deeply of the salt air as though he were breathing in with it some kind of illogical peace and certitude. Finally he got out of the pickup and, carrying his fins, moved along the boardwalk, down the steps, across the beach.

He made his way out into the water, which was quite cold. Knee-deep he stopped to force his feet into the fins. When a wave slapped water up against his chest he gasped with the cold, plunged in, and began swimming hard and fast, breasting the waves at first, then diving under each one. He swam at a slower crawl past the end of the pier, past the sandbar where the waves were breaking, and steadily on until he had almost reached the dark fringes of the kelp bed, half a mile from shore. He stopped to rest for a moment, then, on his back and kicking only with his fins, thrashed along parallel to the beach.

The pier looked small and distant, his car like a toy car on the lot. Behind them the town was spread out, rising steeply above the beach, its bright candybox houses showing among the pines and palms, cypress and eucalyptus, on this rugged

coast whose beauty not even the gas stations, motels, and endless billboards along the highway could spoil. It was a fine town, his town; traditionless, without history, the result of a subdivider's gamble during the boom of the late 1920s, a prosperous middle-class commuting suburb of San Diego, its thirty-five hundred or so inhabitants conservative Republican in politics, overwhelmingly pro the status quo—and why not? There was no hunger or even poverty here. Only dissatisfaction, perhaps, with the two-year-old car, the house with insufficient bedrooms for the growing family or the not large enough living room, with the unreliable TV set, without a dishwasher, garbage disposal, home freezer, or swimming pool. But then these dissatisfactions were necessary to the smooth running of the economy.

He was thinking that here the ultimate in the American Way of Life had been approached when he saw the seal. It appeared not twenty feet from him, just its head. Full face it looked astonishingly like the head of a very tanned old man, and in profile like that of a big dog, with the wrinkled dark skin around the muzzle, the sleek head dripping water and bright beads of water shining on its whiskers. Treading water, he stared back at it, a little frightened at the possibility of an attack, although he'd never heard of a seal attacking a swimmer. Then, under the steady, searching brown eyes, he had the sensation of being appraised completely. The curious and quite intense feeling lasted for what seemed a very long time as the seal watched him, but it could not have been more than half a minute. With a flip of the brown and black body, a small splash, the seal was gone. It did not reappear.

He began the long swim to shore. He paused at the sandbar, where the waves arched their backs and toppled over, and looked back toward the kelp beds. There was nothing visible but the blotches of seaweed and a wave rising. He swam ahead of the wave, felt it catch him, slid forward and down its concave face. He held his arms tight along his body, his head low, as the wave crashed around him; churning steadily with his fins, he was swept onto the beach. When the wave dropped

him he trudged up the dry sand.

He was sitting on the sand, his body dry now in the sun, when someone said, "Hello, Richard," and before he had even turned he knew it was Bea Gregory. No one else in Mardios Beach called him Richard.

Billy was with her, wearing a red playsuit, carrying a shovel and pail and walking with exaggerated liftings of his legs through the sand, as though he were encountering a series of low barriers.

"Hello!" He waved a hand.

Bea waved back; she was coming toward him. He wished she would not. He had been enjoying himself alone, staring out at the ocean and thinking of symbolic theories as to the meaning of the seal. Also she made him nervous. He had first met her when he had been a Great Books leader last year. She had been a member of his group and had been very consistent about coming to the meetings. At first he had been attracted to her—and she was attractive, with her slim brown legs beneath her white shorts, her boyish-looking body, the delicate yet strong structure of her breasts, shoulders, and throat, her pretty, sad, quiet face, the bronze-coloured hair with the streak of gray in it. But his reactions to her had bothered him; he would find himself thinking of her as humanity crushed beneath the steel caterpillar treads of finance capitalism, and sneer at himself for chewing on such rot; or he would find himself impatient with her because she was inferior intellectually, and then feel ashamed of himself for such snobbishness. Always he had with Bea Gregory, especially with Bea, the difficulty of looking upon her as a person and not as a symbol or a type. But when he had uncovered her character from the underbrush of his own abstractions, he had not much liked what he had found. She seemed too much the self-conscious martyr to a brute of a husband, her humility was sometimes a little thick, and, as Jack Rollo, the plumber who had been the star of the Great Books group, had said, "She tries hard, but she hasn't got a hell of a lot on the ball."

Still, he liked her and felt sorry for her. He had been in-

trigued at the thought of making a cuckold of Bill Gregory, but whatever his feelings were toward Bill, Bea was still the man's wife, her emotions were obviously intense and serious, and he had felt cheap for playing with them to the small extent that he had. Nor did he want any affairs with Mardios women. During the summers when there were many strangers in town and life was wilder, comings and goings were not so apt to be remarked on, and, for the last two summers, he had carried on a pleasant casual relationship with Julie Hanson, whose husband flew out from the Imperial Valley to stay with her only every other weekend. The rest of the year he made occasional trips to Los Angeles to see a divorcee to whom he had once, before he had married Betty, been engaged. For less personal relationships, there was always San Diego. He did not want any involvements with the Bea Gregorys of Mardios.

When the Great Books group had terminated he had thought that was the end of it, but he met her frequently on the street and at the beach, and she had begun stopping by the new house when he was working, to talk about nothing in particular and look at him in that strange, searching way, which—he thought with a jolt—was something like the way in which the seal had looked at him.

"Have you been swimming?" she asked. Her face was flushed and she was breathing heavily.

"I have, and I recommend it," he said. "You look as though you've been running, Bea."

She laughed. Her face came to life as she laughed. She pushed a strand of hair back in place and looked around for Billy, who was still trudging toward them through the sand. "Billy's got a new car," she said. "I've been pushing him along the boardwalk."

He saw the car upon the boardwalk, parked against the fence. It looked larger than the usual child's car, shiny black with a chrome grid on the front. "Hello, Billy," he said. "Going to shovel some sand?"

Billy nodded. His lips moved with inaudible words. Finally he got them out. "Hello, Mr. Bannerman." His face was tri-

angular, like Bea's face, his dark eyes large and wide-set, like Bea's. His hair was red. He looked unhealthily frail as he hunkered down and began heaping sand in his bucket. Billy looked up once and smiled at his mother, and then smiled politely at him.

"You'll leave a little for the people to lie on, won't you, Billy?"

The uncertain lips formed the trial words. He stutters so, Bea had said once. She had said it in a flat unemotional voice, but he had heard the tears behind it. Maybe it will go away though, she had said, maybe it's just a phase. Billy said, "I'm nnnnnnnnnnnn-not going to tttt-take any way."

"Oh, that's good." Bea always seemed pleased and grateful when he managed to strike up a conversation with Billy, but now, watching the thin little arm working steadily to pack the pail full of sand, he could think of nothing more to say.

He turned to Bea. With the flush gone, she looked tired and there were dark, angled smudges below her eyes. She produced her strained smile. "Isn't it a beautiful day?" she said.

"Fine day."

The conversation withered and died, as it so often did after the platitudes had been run through.

"Mother," Bill said, "can I go play down by the www—" He waved his arm toward the water's edge.

"Of course, darling," Bea said. He, Richard, stood with her and watched Billy run down the beach, squat in the damp sand, and begin building a wall by filling his bucket with sand and upending it in a row of crumbling, truncated cones.

"Have you any children, Richard?" Bea asked suddenly.

He shook his head at the first personal question she had ever asked him. "None," he said. She kept looking at him, and he felt a pressure to explain. He wished he had brought his pipe with him; it was easy to chew on the bit of a pipe and say nothing without seeming rude. He said, "It was—" He hesitated over "impossible" or "inadvisable," said the former and then felt in her steady look the pressure to explain further. His ex-wife had been prone to miscarriages, dangerous and heart-

rending, in the fourth month of pregnancy. After the second miscarriage they had given up. But he didn't say anything more, and Bea glanced away.

Presently Bea said, "Divorce is terrible when there are children, isn't it? Or maybe it isn't. I suppose you can't make generalities like that."

"I don't know about the children, of course. But I regard the institution of divorce with approval."

"Do you?"

"I do. My wife and I were incompatible and miserable. Now she is happily married to an oil well in Texas and I am a bachelor, which couldn't please me more."

Bea's face came alive as she laughed again. She found a cigarette in her striped beach bag. He took her matches and lit the cigarette for her, and as she glanced up at him through her lashes, almost coyly, she looked very young and pretty. Obviously she had taken his reference to bachelorhood as a joke to be enjoyed between them. It was as though she were in the process of cold-bloodedly trying to decide whether or not to shed Bill Gregory like a dirty shirt—or a hair shirt—and put him on instead. Making sure that he liked Billy and Billy him, that he was a solid citizen, that there were at least a few points of agreement between them, that he worked hard and was capable of supporting her and Billy—probably, like Betty, the first and last Mrs. Richard Bannerman, she had that uncanny ability to guess exactly a man's income, not so much in terms of dollars as in supporting ability and social position, and then setting out to attract him.

Bea sat down on the sand and tossed her head back and smiled up at the sun. He sat down beside her. The waves slashed in along the pier, and out on the ocean there was only the red-brown kelp floating just beneath the surface of the water.

"Have you seen *Ivanhoe*?" Bea asked.

"The movie? No."

"I went to see it last night."

He was unable to calculate what this tack was now, but it

gave him an opportunity to go off on a tack of his own. "The only thing I remember about the book is the Templar," he said. "Bryan something. Bryan du Bois something."

"Bryan du Bois Guilbert."

"A real character. A real tragic hero if Scott had been able to give him a little more honesty instead of fiddling with his stalwart wooden fathead of an Ivanhoe. You remember when we did *Hamlet* in Great Books? Bryan whatever-it-is is something like that—too intelligent for his world of chivalry and religious-military orders but caught in it. Cynical instead of despairing. Good man."

Bea did not seem pleased. "Bill said he saw you at the Jacaranda last night," she said.

It was, he thought, either an effort to find out if he was a heavy drinker or an introduction to a discussion of her miseries with her husband, or both. Immediately he was ashamed of being cynical, because she was a nice girl and must be horribly unhappy, and, in a way, he was being asked to help. For the starving Indians, for the distant victims of war, persecution, slave camps, and lynchings, he was the bleeding heart; for those around him he was Bryan du Bois Guilbert.

"Yes," he said. "He very kindly brought me a drink."

She picked up a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers to form a smooth small mound. He looked at the gray stripe in her hair and wondered how old she was. Thirty—in her early thirties anyway.

Billy was coming up the beach toward them, lugging the little pail and shovel. "I want to go home," Billy said. "I want to go home in my car."

"But we just got here, darling."

"Well, but we'd better go home. We'd better go home and see if Ddd-daddy's up yet." Billy's wide, almost blank eyes inspected him, no longer friendly.

"Oh, Daddy's already up and gone to San Diego," Bea said.

"Well, we'd better go see if he got up." Billy's mouth drooped into a pout, his face clouded; he looked as though he were going to cry. "I www-want to ggg-go home!"

Bea jumped to her feet, picked Billy up, and swung him around. "You're so big and heavy, darling! All right, we'll go home and see if Daddy's up now."

Billy eyed him over Bea's shoulder. He said, his face clearing. "My father lost eight hundred dollars playing pppppp-poker."

Billy must consider him a threat, he thought suddenly: the abrupt decision to leave, thus taking Bea out of danger; the eight hundred dollars lost at poker, which could mean nothing to a four-year-old other than a lot of money and a point of pride, brought out to establish the superiority of his father. He felt shaken. "That's a lot of money, Billy," he said.

Billy nodded. "Didn't he, Mother?"

"Yes, darling," Bea said, and let him down.

He tugged at her hand. "Lll-let's go!"

He smiled in response to Bea's unhappy smile. As they started away he called, "Billy, when you run out of blocks come by and I'll give you some more. Will you?"

"All right," Billy said without turning. Then after a few more steps he looked back over his shoulder and said, "Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Bea did not look back. She helped Billy up the wooden steps. Billy climbed into his little car, and she pushed it around to start back along the boardwalk. He saw her rocking the car back and forth. "Oh, dear," he heard her say, "we ran into a ditch, didn't we?"

"Harder!" Billy cried in his thin voice. "Push harder, Mother!"

He, Richard, hurried across the sand and up the steps to help. One of the front wheels was tightly wedged in a crack in the boardwalk. He freed it. The little car was solidly built and very heavy—a copy of Bill Gregory's own Cadillac, he realized, with a flash of mixed contempt and anger. It had a bright chrome grille and hubcaps, fenders that swept up at the back, an upright spare-tyre rack, dials on the dashboard. Billy was working the little gear lever back and forth.



"That's a fine car, Billy," he said.

"It cost a hundred and forty dollars," Billy said without a stutter and sat up very straight.

"Billy! It's not polite to talk about how much things cost."

"But Dddd-daddy had it made specially. The ssss-speed—speed thing goes up to a hundred twenty."

There was a bright line of perspiration across Bea's upper lip and her face was flushed. He felt very unhappy for her, watching her raise her hands to smooth back her hair. As she bent to push the car again he inadvertently touched her arm. The flesh was very cool.

"Faster, Mother!" Billy said.

He took over the pushing from Bea. The car jolted along the rough planks of the boardwalk. "Faster!" Billy cried shrilly. "Faster, please!" He was bent over the steering wheel "Lill-look at me! I'm gggg-going seventy-five miles an hour! Look at me, Mother!"

The car trundled noisily along the boardwalk under his hands. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw Bea running to catch up. He pushed the car harder as Billy cried, "Faster! Faster!" until there was a rising note of fright and near hysteria in the boy's voice. He stopped then, and let the car roll to a stop. Bea came up.

"Can you manage, Bea?"

"Oh yes," she said without looking at him. "Thank you, Richard. I can manage. It's not very far."

"Push me! Push me!" Billy cried, rocking the car.

He watched Bea push the little car on over the planks, and, where the boardwalk was overgrown with pickleweed, out into the street and up the street and out of sight.

## Saturday 2

THE ivory-coloured clock on the table between the twin beds

marked a few minutes before nine when Mary-Lynn Sieber woke. She turned her head to see Jeanne's bed already neatly made, yawned, made a face. There were five bedrooms in her Aunt Grace's and Uncle Douglas's house, and she would have loved to have one to herself, but she had had to seem glad when her cousin Jeanne, who was a classmate at San Diego State College, had asked her to share hers.

The house seemed very quiet. Yawning again, still feeling tired from last night, she went into the bathroom to wash her face, brush her teeth, paint her mouth, which was swollen from Keith's kisses—how many kisses? Out the window the sky was very blue. Back in the bedroom she hesitated over the new halter and shorts Jeanne had said she was welcome to wear. Finally she put them on and went down the hall to the living room. She stopped there and worked her bare toes into the thick rich carpeting and looked around her at the wide windows that showed the tops of trees and the ocean framed through the trees, at the sofa which must be almost nine feet long, at the easy chairs and occasional chairs, at the coffee table and end tables, at the heavy ceramic ashtrays and the expensively framed pink, blue, and yellow Diego Rivera peons on the wall over the fireplace. She stood there digging her toes into the carpet and breathing deeply, as though she were feeling and breathing the whole atmosphere of having money, comfort, luxury—absorbing it all with an intense pleasure, until, as it always did, the resentment at inescapable comparisons broke into her mood. This house in Mardios: her father's little old house on Forty-third Street out in the sticks of East San Diego. Jeanne's and Cora's clothes: her own clothes. Jeanne and Cora never having to worry about anything: her own sickening fear that her father wasn't going to be able to let her go back to State in the fall. Uncle Douglas's Cadillac and Aunt Grace's Pontiac station wagon: her father's old Hudson.

The pleasure of entering this room, the pleasure of being here at all, was spoiled, and she was ill at ease and tense. This summer she had been asked to stay for only two weeks, and

one of the weeks was almost gone. Through the window she watched the train, long and silver, pulling slowly out of the little station above the beach, headed toward San Diego.

Now she could hear voices in the patio, and she trudged across the living room toward the glass door. They were all sitting in the patio, Uncle Douglas who was on his vacation, Aunt Grace, and Cora and Jeanne. Her aunt, tall, pale, and graceful, rose. "Good morning, dear," she said in a cool voice and smiled faintly. "Come along, Cora," Aunt Grace said, and Cora rose too. Cora glanced at her out of the corners of her eyes. Uncle Douglas was frowning down at his cigar. He struck a match and held it to the end.

"I thought you were going to sleep all day," Jeanne said loudly and laughed. Her laugh was shaky.

Jeanne seemed scared, Aunt Grace had been cold, Uncle Douglas seemed angry; suddenly she was very frightened. She sat down in the chair next to Jeanne, which Aunt Grace had vacated; she crossed her legs, wet her lips, smiled at Uncle Douglas.

He shook his cigar at her. "Now, see here, Mary-Lynn. You were out pretty darn late last night!"

She assumed a puzzled, anxious expression. "Gee, I don't think it was very late, Uncle Doug. It was only about one-thirty. Wasn't it about one-thirty, Jeanne?"

"It was about that," Jeanne said. She flushed, squirmed down in her chair, and plucked at the edges of her shorts. "Gee, I don't—It certainly didn't *seem* very late."

"It was considerably later than one-thirty," Uncle Douglas said. His round red face was set in a heavy scowl. He was a tremendous wheel at Consolidated-Vultee in San Diego, while her father ran a little hardware store on University Avenue in East San Diego, and she hated them both. He looked down as he flicked ashes from his cigar, and Jeanne went through frantic facial contortion to explain something she didn't understand. She felt cold and fright. What if Uncle Douglas should send her home? He was just looking for some reason to send her home. She had known she was staying out dangerously late

last night, but it had been so important. She was exhausted from the strain of trying to calculate everything, to balance the danger of having this time in Mardios Beach pass without anything to show for it against the risk that if she stayed out too late Uncle Doug might wake up and look at the clock, and then he might send her home. Either way, to go back to San Diego with nothing set, nothing to hold on to, and her father already hinting around that maybe he couldn't afford for her to go back to college. She would have to take some crummy job somewhere, and then just nothing and nothing and nothing. Worrying about that last night, the constant, hard, exhausting effort to make it all work out perfectly when she wasn't really sure exactly how she wanted everything to work out. Just so there wouldn't be just nothing. . . . But what if Uncle Doug sent her home now?

He raised his head ponderously and squinted at her. "Now see here, Mary-Lynn. Jeanne's told me you haven't seen this Rankin kid since last year. But just the same he ought to have sense enough not to come around here at ten or ten-thirty. And you—"

"We just went out to get a Coke, Uncle Doug."

"There are plenty of Cokes in the refrigerator. You could have had a Coke here and watched TV. And it doesn't take four hours to go get a Coke either." He put the cigar back in his mouth and chewed on the end, with a rolling sideways motion of his jaw. "Now see here—you have to realize that your Aunt Grace and I are responsible for you while you're up here. What would your mother say if she knew you were staying out till two-thirty or so?"

"It *couldn't* have been that late, Uncle Doug!"

"It was a quarter till two," Jeanne said positively. "I woke up when Mary came in and I could see the clock. I remember now; it was quarter of two."

"Well, I don't know exactly what time it was, but it was too darn late! I mean it now! Maybe it would have been all right if you and Mary-Lynn and a couple of boys—" He stopped. She saw Jeanne flush scarlet. She saw him flush too; he knew

he'd hurt Jeanne, who was hardly ever asked out at all.

She felt herself relax. She was all right now.

"Well, I mean it now!" Uncle Doug said angrily and got up and left.

She watched him through the glass door of the living room until he was out of sight.

"Whew!" Jeanne whispered. "I'll go get Lillian to bring us some coffee."

She watched Jeanne go inside too, stretched, and giggled nervously. She looked down at her red toenails, her brown legs, Jeanne's shorts. The shorts looked so much better on her than on Jeanne, and the halter hung disgustingly on Jeanne's flat chest. She stretched again. Everything seemed hopeful again. She knew she had been right last night. It had not been merely another LP mad-makeout. Keith had said he loved her over and over again, and he hadn't been saying it just to get her to go all the way, because he hadn't tried. Unless he was playing it smarter and slower or something. She bit her lip and frowned; no, it wasn't that. It had all worked out just right and Uncle Doug hadn't even threatened to send her home.

Jeanne came back and sat down. "Are you going to the beach with Keith today?"

She nodded distantly

"Sounds kind of serious," Jeanne said.

She shrugged.

"I did look at the clock, you know," Jeanne whispered. "It was almost three, Mary." She was silent for a moment, then said in a bantering voice, "Gee, don't you get tired making out that long?"

"We weren't making out all the time. We were talking." It angered her to feel, suddenly, that she had to confide in Jeanne. She told herself it was a favour to Jeanne, but she knew it was not merely that. She had to confide in someone, and she was grateful to Jeanne, who was always on her side, who was her friend, her only friend, or as near a friend as she had ever had. "He wants to get married," she said in a low voice.

"Get married!" Jeanne whispered.

"That's what we were talking about so long. Don't you tell anyone. Don't you dare tell Cora."

"Oh, I wouldn't!" Jeanne breathed. "No kidding! You mean elope? Are you *going* to?"

She shrugged and tried to seem blasé about it. But she was trembling. She didn't know how serious Keith had been about it last night, but he had *seemed* terribly serious. She was afraid, almost superstitiously so, to think too much about it. But if everything started to go to hell—if she could only keep him serious about it, keep everything balanced and under control, then if—

"I think he's awfully nice," Jeanne said. "Real cool."

"He's awfully—oh, you know—young sometimes."

"Gee, but he goes to Cal and all. I think he's awfully good-looking. Athletic-looking. I like tall men like that, basketball types. And that's sure a real nervous convertible."

Lillian, the tall skinny Negro maid brought out a tray on which were two cups of black coffee, a plate of buttered toast, a dish of apricot jam. Lillian put the tray down on the patio table, gave her a hostile look, and went back to the house. She watched the maid go, hating her.

"Thanks a lot, Lillian," Jeanne called.

She took a piece of toast and a cup of coffee, nibbled at the toast, sipped the coffee. "Jimmy Martin's got a better convertible than that," she said.

"If you want to know, I think Jimmy Martin's a greaseball," Jeanne said. "I just hate it the way those guys get their hair cut like that."

"Well, Keith's mother hasn't really got an awful lot of money. They're not really *rich*."

"Oh, rich-smich. You're always worrying about whether somebody's *rich* or not. Nobody's really rich any more anyway with the awful old taxes, Daddy says."

She didn't think Jeanne, who was rich, knew anything about it, but she kept silent. Mrs. Rankin had those dress shops; she had visited each of them last fall after she had met Keith.

"Mrs. Rankin's sure attractive," Jeanne went on. "She sure

looks young. She's really got a cool figure. I hope I look like that when I get old and not—well, not like mother."

She, Mary-Lynn, felt shocked. She had always wished that her own mother, Aunt Grace's sister, looked like Aunt Grace, and talked and dressed like her. But Jeanne was dissatisfied with Aunt Grace; it was as though no one were ever satisfied, as though when you had found one image of perfection for yourself, and achieved it, there was another one beyond to strive after. Yet she understood perfectly what Jeanne meant about Mrs. Rankin.

"She's terrific," she said. She tried to say it matter-of-factly. Mrs. Rankin had come from some crummy little town in Illinois, poor, as she was, attractive, as she felt she was, smart, as she knew she was. Starting out by herself and doing it all by herself, as she hoped—certain sometimes, terrified others—that she could. She leaned back stiffly against the cold iron back of her chair. Jeanne was staring at her.

"Keith told me all about her," she said to Jeanne. "Do you know what? She never even went to college at all. She married some trumpet player when she was eighteen—younger than I am even!—and had Keith right way. And this jerk just went off and left her and Keith—"

"Didn't Keith ever know his father at all?"

She shook her head impatiently. "—and she just parked Keith somewhere and went off to New York and got a job modelling, and then she got a job buying for some big store in L.A. Then during the war she saved a lot of money and started those shops in San Diego." She paused for breath. "All by herself," she said.

"I sure like that one downtown," Jeanne said. "It's a terrific shop. They carry Allegretti shoes now—did you know that? Really *Vogue*-y clothes and—"

"No," she said, "they're *Mademoiselle* type. They're high-styled but not *too*. And they're pretty cheap, but not *too* cheap. They're what everybody can buy, and that's the way she's made so much, done so well. She's smart."

Jeanne whispered, "Did you know she had an affair with

that Bill Gregory? Everybody says he moved up here just to be near her. Everybody in Mardios knows about them."

"Keith doesn't like him."

"Oh, I don't either. Daddy doesn't either."

"Well, I don't see what's so wrong with him. He makes lots of money—" She stopped, flushing angrily. She wasn't ever going to talk to Jeanne about money again. But even though she felt vaguely that she should dislike Bill Gregory too, out of loyalty to Keith, she didn't see what was wrong with him. Bill Gregory and Hattie Rankin having an affair seemed romantic and fitting, like a couple of heroic-sized lovers out of a novel. She thought of Mrs. Rankin on the beach last summer; it was the only time she had met her, and she had felt gauche and inconsequential, and knew she had been made to feel so. But she was only young, she told herself angrily. She knew she was attractive, she was! She knew she was smart, and she was determined.

"She didn't even go to college," she said half aloud.

"Who?" Jeanne said. "Oh, Hey, maybe she'd give you a job. Mary! I'll bet she would if you showed her some of those models you drew in that art course last year."

She didn't answer, drinking her coffee. Had the gowns she designed been any good? Yes, they had been good! Everyone had said so.

Jeanne giggled and said, "Except if you and Keith ran off and got married you wouldn't need a job."

"Oh, who wants to be a dumb old housewife!"

Jeanne giggled again. "Vaulting ambition," she said. "That's from Macbeth; I think it's Macbeth. Anyway, vaulting ambition's your trouble. I'll bet Keith wouldn't like it if you were married and you went out and got some keen career-type job."

She was listening to a roar of straight pipes, the sound of a car stopping in front of the house.

Jeanne said, "Or maybe if you married Keith, Mrs. Rankin would give you one of the shops or a part interest or something. So when she retires. I'll bet you'd be terrific at it, Mary."



The door chimes sounded. Jeanne got up and ran to answer the door.

Keith and Jeanne came out on the patio together. He had on his blue Cal letter sweater again and his swimming trunks. The sweater was so long that the shorts hardly showed beneath it. She saw the fraternity pin fastened to his sweater and knew why it was there.

"Hi, Mary-Lynn," he said, sat down, and immediately got up again. "Let's go down to the beach, uh?"

"Why don't you come with us?" she said to Jeanne, who was hanging back.

"Oh no. Thanks. Cora and I are going down later."

Keith was scowling. "Why don't you come with us now?" she said to Jeanne. "There's plenty of room in Keith's car. Isn't there, Keith?"

Keith said, sure, plenty of room, but Jeanne refused again, excused herself, and fled.

When she and Keith had gone outside and he was helping her into his car, he muttered, "Now why the hell did you have to make all that fuss about her coming along?"

"Well, *you* should have asked her. I'm her guest, you know." But she was sorry she had done it. It was the sort of thing you had to do though; you were supposed to keep a boy on edge, so he was never too sure that he meant something to you or that you wanted to be alone with him. Now Jeanne was probably making her bed for her so Lillian wouldn't bitch and sulk about it. There had been no reason to embarrass Jeanne like that, and now Keith seemed sullen and angry.

"What's the matter, Keith?" she said as he started the car.

"I'm sick of everything."

"Sick of what?"

"Everything! I mean sick of the way everybody is. Being phony and dirty and—oh, I don't know."

He didn't look at her, driving down the hill toward the beach, and suddenly she felt rejected and lost. It hadn't been anything last night; he'd just been talking. That was always the way it was, just whenever everything seemed bright and

ready to pop, it all just leaked away. She thought of not going back to State College in the fall—she knew she wasn't going to get to go back to college!—and what could she do? Get some horrible old job. Her father was always saying how smart he had been to make her take typing when she hadn't wanted to, because she could always get a good job as a secretary. That was all *he* knew. A dumb secretary, typing away. Not even a secretary, just a typist. They got about a hundred and seventy dollars a month. She thought of going to New York, just taking off and going—and knew she didn't have the courage.

Keith said, "I didn't mean I was sick of you, Mary-Lynn."

"Well, thanks a lot," she said coldly.

He stopped for the light at the highway. Traffic streamed along, the cars rushing past, the trucks grinding past more slowly. She watched the drag chain on a gas truck bouncing and sparking.

"Oh, hell, Mary-Lynn," Keith said. "Hey, let's not get in a beef. Bad start. Cheerful and gay today," he said and gave her a weak grin. His hand sought hers, and she let him take it, gripping his hand tightly and feeling the sweaty warmth of it.

"What's the matter, Keith?" she said again.

The light changed, the back tyres skidded as Keith got off to a rapid start. He shrugged. "Oh, I don't know." She saw him glance at the Jacaranda Bar. "I'm just all depressed," he said. "Don't you ever get like that?"

"I wasn't this morning."

He didn't say anything.

"After last night," she said.

Keith laughed and flushed and squeezed her hand. "Jesus, I'd be so low I'd be speleological if it wasn't for last night. No, just a lot of things stacking up. I'm kind of sick of school. I'm—well, sick of Hattie supporting me and birding around up at Cal. I get to feeling I ought to quit and get a job. Somewhere else. I'm sick of California. But that would be real stupid. It's all real stupid. It'll pass. It's better already."

"It would be real stupid not to finish school."

"Hell, I know. I'd just get drafted and be sent over to Korea. But I don't like thinking about going back to school at the end of summer and you down here. I write real dumb letters."

"I don't like to think about it either."

"Hey, what we ought to do, you ought to come up to the Bay for a weekend sometime and we'll go have a big night over in the City."

"I'd love to."

She saw him flush again, and the car slowed. "Listen," he said. "I wasn't just saying it last night, Mary-Lynn. I love you, Mary-Lynn."

She smiled at him, but he wouldn't look at her, and he was silent until he had stopped the car, got out, and helped her out. Carrying his blanket and a towel, he followed her along the boardwalk. She saw three or four people on the beach, a man halfway out along the pier, a red pickup truck and an old station wagon parked in the lot. The ocean was smooth and blue-green, with an occasional wave humping clear and lighter green and spilling over to show a glassy-smooth back before it dissolved into white froth.

Keith grasped her arm. "Let's go down the beach the other way," he said, and he sounded grouchy again. "I'm sick of being around people. Adults," he said.

They went down the steps to the beach and walked through the warm sand south of the pier. She glanced at the black enamel fraternity pin fastened to his sweater. He headed for the inlet in the cliff where they had gone to make out several times last summer. It was enclosed by high yellow sandstone walls, in which many initials had been cut. At the end of the inlet were the charred remains of a fire. Keith spread the blanket carefully, and they sat down on it. She dug her toes into the warm sand.

Immediately he began to kiss her. He kissed her for a long time, pressing her hard against him, and she felt sure of him again and confident. She ran her hand over the short hairs at the back of his head. Finally he released her and leaned back to strip off the blue letter sweater. Beneath it his chest

was very broad and flat in a T-shirt with a U of C stencilled across the front. He bent his head as he unfastened the fraternity pin; then he looked up at her, his face red and abashed, his grin crooked, his heavy eyebrows a splash of black across his forehead.

"Hey, how about it, Mary-Lynn?"

"Do you want me to wear it?"

"Will you?"

"If you want me to." She looked down. "I'd love to wear it," she said. "Aren't you supposed to pin it on?"

She sat up very straight, staring past him, as he leaned forward to attach the pin to her halter. She felt his hand fumbling as he tried to get the point of the pin through the material, and she thought, against her will, of the other pins she had been given. Twice they had clearly been bribes. David Marcy had taken his back the same night because the bribe hadn't worked. Brad Koenig's bribe had; damn him, damn him, he had gone away to Stanford the next semester and had written for his pin, and then at Christmas time had come back in his new convertible to take her out and had wanted to do it again without even the offer of the pin this time. Damn him! And Jimmy Martin. She had given Jimmy his pin back before she had come up to Mardios this summer, because he was a grease-ball as Jeanne had said, even if he did have a cool car. She had picked a fight with him and returned his pin because she hadn't wanted him coming up to see her and getting in the way.

The pin pricked her with a sharp sliver of pain. "Ouch!" she cried and felt suddenly furious.

"Sorry!" Keith mumbled and accomplished the pinning. "Hurt?" he asked anxiously.

She didn't answer. The sun was very bright in her eyes. Everything was spoiled. He was only eighteen, almost a year younger than she was, and a big jerk. He had pinned the pin to Jeanne's halter and pricked her clumsily. Everything phony and dirty, he had said. Sick of everything. He didn't have the slightest idea what it meant to be sick of everything. Having

to be, and knowing you were, phony and dirty, calculating, bitchy, chasing after an eighteen-year-old jerk because his mother had money and those dress shops, and had found the way, and all that, sick of everything and frightened all the time and always having to be working toward something, when you didn't even know what it was and were scared of it because you were afraid you couldn't make it for yourself.

"How clumsy can you get?" Keith said. He was looking at her pleadingly. A little of her rage slipped away.

"I'm sorry, Mary-Lynn," he said.

Her smile felt very stiff. "Well, I guess you really pinned me," she said.

"I guess I really did. Sealed with blood and all, uh?" He laughed, and she forced herself to laugh with him, their laughter strained and false and unhappy. But when he began to kiss her again she kissed him back with as much passion, more, than she had ever genuinely found in herself.

## Saturday 3

HATTIE RANKIN was drinking her second cup of coffee when she heard the distant keening of steel wheels on steel rails—the 9.02 train from Los Angeles coming into Mardios station. Keith wasn't up yet, but she knew he was awake. He was waiting for her to leave for San Diego.

Her third cigarette of the morning tasted vile, and she squashed it out in the ashtray, half smoked. Her intuition was working overtime. But it wasn't all intuition; there were logical deductions too, and he was her son. She knew when something was wrong, and she ought to know what it was that was wrong; she'd been expecting it long enough. Somebody had finally got around to filling him in about her and Bill, and she was

sure it had been that little Mary-Lynn Sieber. He had evidently spent most of yesterday with her ; when he had come home he had acted very oddly, and when she had heard him snap off one of Bill's commercials on the radio it had been a kind of corny confirmation. The deception she had carried on, for how many years?—for Keith's sake, of course, of course—had failed just when there was no more need for it.

So she had been shaken into her little lecture last night, not to tell him anything but to try to excuse herself if he had found out. She had thought it was going to be all right then. But it was not like him to stay out until well after two without having told her he was going to be late. And when he had come in he had not answered when she called to him. Mary-Lynn, or someone else, must have told him at long last, and it was nice to be able to blame Mary-Lynn or someone else for everything, wasn't it?

Now he was waiting for her to leave before he got up, and she didn't have the guts to go in and find out the pitch. As she finished her coffee she was feeling very strongly the old resentment and rebelliousness. This had always been her reaction against disapproval, stemming from her mother's and her sister's disapproval of everything she had ever done. And of course Keith had been brought up in that shabby genteel respectability with his grandmother and his Aunt Lorraine. Brought up in it by her default, she reminded herself, until, when he was ten, Lorraine had written to say that she and her Doctor John Willis, having no children of their own, would like to adopt Keith. The letter had told what a good home they had already made for Keith, their plans for his education and career, how he loved them and they him. Shocked, she had immediately sent for Keith to come out to the coast, and then had endured her mother's reproachful letters and Lorraine's hurt silence for years. Now every second or third summer her mother, Lorraine, and Doctor Willis would drive out from Illinois to see her and Keith—like a supervisory committee—and stay a week that made her almost insane. Between times she could almost forget the weight of that accusing martyred, practised disap-

proval. Then something would bring it back; some memory of Galesburg, or her marriage, letters from her mother or Lorraine, even something in Keith sometimes. Immediately the old defences would rise to meet it—but not against her son.

She went into the bedroom and threw off her robe. In her closet hung eight new models from the summer line she had brought home with her, all in the twenty-to-forty-dollar bracket. As a model, back before the war, she had longed for the expensive things, not hers, which she put on her back. Now that she could afford them they no longer mattered. She knew without being vain about it that she could wear anything. She put on an off-white linen sunback priced at \$24/75, tilted her head in front of the mirror, pointed a foot, swung round, smiled at her reflection. The smile was ghastly.

When she left her room again she gazed at Keith's door but it didn't open, and she heard no sound inside his room. She sat in her car in the garage, warming it up longer than was necessary, but Keith did not come out.

On the highway she thrust her foot down hard on the accelerator and started for San Diego. It was a drive she always enjoyed. She loved the restraint of the colours—the brown of the hills, the blackish green of the Torrey pines, and, to the east, the blue-brown mountains. From time to time there would come into view a slice of the ocean, vividly blue and white. But as she neared San Diego, more and more there were signs to spoil it, first the grubby, untended advertisements of hotels and twenty-four-hour garages with tow-car service, then the gawdy demands that you try this beer, that toothpaste, detergent, deodorant, the huge bright billboards claiming so much value in new cars, hospitalisation plans, TV sets, funeral homes, vitamin-enriched breads, gasolines and motor oils. More than anywhere else she had ever lived or been, there were the reiterated and wildly competitive efforts to sell—the 49c. a pound steaks, the Save 5c. gas stations, the \$6.95 recaps and batteries (in the next block they would be \$5.98), the \$500-down two-bedroom and double-garage homes in the housing developments, the used cars for nothing down and two whole months before the first

payment. Yet the small, dignified "SALE" signs put in the windows of her own shops were the same thing, weren't they? Suddenly she was oppressed by all of it, as though everybody in the world were trying to sell something to everybody else, and all were caught in a circling, endless chase.

She drove through the lane of billboards into the outskirts of San Diego, slowing as she came into the traffic around the Marine Base, the big aircraft plants, the air terminus, and the Civic Centre. She turned east on Ash Street and parked her car in the lot at Fifth and Ash. It was going to be a hot day. She trotted down Fifth Avenue in the sun, her heels jolting on the sidewalk. She could feel the beginnings of a headache. HATTIE RANKIN, the sign over her shop said. The window dresser had changed the window last night. There was a corner of the new line of accessories, three faceless mannequins hung with summer models, a jewelled cashmere.

Katie Morse was just opening the door. "Good morning, Hattie."

"Good morning," she said crisply. "A hot one today."

Katie chocked the glass door open. She was a painfully thin woman of fifty, with a pert face, wide harlequin glasses, and short gray hair. Miss Hotchkiss was down in the lingerie department, folding bras into their boxes. Miss Small was dusting the accessories in the glass case. How many thousand dollars' worth of clothes hung on racks and in the closets down the left side of the store?—her store. She felt pride hard and fierce, like watching the flag marching past with bands playing—her big downtown store, the product of her brains and hard work and taste. But not of her money.

In the office at the back of the store she sat down at the desk she shared with Katie Morse, glanced briefly at the white plastic-covered telephone, then pressed her face into her hands and blew out her breath in a long sigh. She felt a migraine coming on and she hadn't had one for almost a year.

She thought of Keith in bed with his door closed, being very quiet and waiting for her to leave, and of Mary-Lynn Sieber telling him the sad and dirty story. But someone would have



had to tell him eventually. She, who should have, never had.

With a sudden movement she jerked the phone out of its cradle and dialled the number of Bill's office in the Bank of America building. He was never there, but sometimes the secretary had a vague idea where he might be reached. The girl had no idea; had she tried the lots? She tried the lots, seven of them. Mr. Gregory had not been around this morning. She called the office again. The secretary said to call Mr. Smith, Bill's lawyer, or the radio station. As a matter of fact he might be at the radio station with Mr. DiGarmo. She called Mr. DiGarmo's office at KFSC. Yes, Mr. Gregory was with Mr. DiGarmo but they were in Mr. Charles Green's office. She was connected with Mr. Charles Green's office. Who was calling, please? Just a moment, Mrs. Rankin.

"Oh, hi, Hat," Bill said. "What's up?"

"How busy are you?"

"Pretty busy, Hat. Why?"

"Bill," she said, and her voice shook a little. "I've got to talk to you. Keith seems to be all up in the air about something. I'm afraid—"

Bill broke in with a disgusted sound. "I'll tell you what it is. I was in the Jac Bar last night and he came in. I hadn't seen him for a hell of a time so I wanted to buy him a drink. But Ernie's sick and some goddam stupid wetback he's got pitching drinks wouldn't serve him. I guess he got embarrassed. He took off before I could stop him. I told that Mex—"

"All right," she said.

"Listen, Hat, what the hell did I do wrong? You sound like—"

"You didn't do anything wrong."

"Listen, wait a minute—"

The line buzzed vacantly. She stared into the mouthpiece of the phone and saw Keith snapping off the radio, Keith listening to her sidestepping around the subject, Keith and Bill in the Jacaranda, and couldn't see it all, but felt it—could feel it for Keith. She knew what she had to do now, something else she'd never gotten around to.

Bill's voice came back on the line. "Listen, Hat, I got up late this morning and didn't get any breakfast. How about meeting me down at Musso's in fifteen minutes or so?"

"Good," she said and hung up. She stared down at her engagement pad. Poor Keith. Poor kid. Telling him to grow up. The migraine beat down on her head and started to squeeze. "Go away," she said aloud. "Go away." She rose, opened the door, and beckoned to Katie Morse. There were three or four customers in the store already.

"I've got a headache," she said to Katie. "I'm going home. Mr. Mannix from Summer Maid is coming in this morning, but you'll have to ask him to come back Monday or Tuesday. And I wish you'd call Fox in La Jolla. She's having trouble with one of her girls. Calm her down and tell her I'll see her the first of the week. If anything comes up, call me at home."

"All right, Hattie. You need a good rest anyway. Do you want an aspirin?"

"They don't do any good. See you Monday." She got her purse and hurried out of the shop and down to Musso's Grill on Fourth Avenue to meet Bill.

She found an empty booth toward the rear of Musso's, which was a big, noisy, usually crowded place, all chrome and black plastic seats and mirrors. She sat drinking coffee and chain-smoking. It was a half-hour before Bill showed up.

He was wearing bone-yellow slacks and a horror of a hound's-tooth sports coat. His thinning red hair was slicked down. There were pouches from fatigue under his eyes, but his broad strong face radiated confidence and friendliness. He patted her bare arm and said, "Hi, Hat," as he sat down opposite her. She looked down at the brown flesh of her arm and thought, not angrily, not even wonderingly, of her flesh, which had tricked her sensibilities for so long, or overpowered them.

"I feel like hell," Bill said. "Really hung."

"Big night?"

"Over at Marty Reed's. Those pirates lifted eight hundred bucks off me. and Marty had some kind of half-ass bourbon made me sick as a dog. Then I went by the Jac, and that with

Keith, and when I got home Bea and I had a bitch. *Bad night.*"

"You ought to stay home and play canasta."

"Canasta," he said disgustedly. "Say, Hat, I'm sorry about that with Keith. I really gave that Mex bartender hell."

She just nodded, watching the waitress coming up behind him. The waitress was young and cute in her checked uniform. "Hi, honey," Bill would say.

"Hi, honey," Bill said, grinning, and the waitress flushed with pleasure at being noticed by such a big-shot as Mr. Gregory. Probably she, Hattie, had acted much the same way when she had been at that age, in New York, alone and on the make—and Keith left at home with his grandmother. Maybe she had been that way too when she had first met Bill in Los Angeles in 1943. But he had been no big-shot to her then; she had had a very fancy job as a head buyer, and he was only a used-car dealer up from San Diego with a pocketful of cash from above ceiling-price car deals.

Bill ordered a plate of ham and eggs, and she asked for more coffee.

"You're looking good, Hat," Bill said when the waitress had gone.

"Thanks. I don't feel very good. Some things to discuss, Bill."

"Shoot."

She lit a cigarette. She thought of the convolutions she had gone through last night to try to explain things to Keith without telling him anything. She shouldn't have to do it with Bill. She and Bill had known each other well, as friends, business acquaintances, and for periods, all unofficially, as husband and wife; actually they should know each other better than husbands and wives.

"I'm going to give it to you straight," she said. "We should be able to talk straight to each other, shouldn't we?"

"Sure, Hat," he said and looked concerned.

"Keith's just figured it out about you and me. I think he has."

Bill flushed.

"I don't know whether he's mad or just stricken. I don't—" She stopped and stared down at the trembling cigarette between her fingers. "Why didn't I tell him before this?" she said. "I should have told him last year or the year before. But I was a coward and I didn't."

"He's a good kid," Bill offered.

"He is a good kid." The ash from her cigarette dropped to the black tabletop. When she wiped it away it left a grey smear. "I know what he thinks of me," she said. "I think you take things pretty hard at that age. After all, I'm his mother. A hell of a mother."

"Take it easy, Hat."

"I can't take it easy. I don't think he's taking it easy. See, he's never liked you much, Bill."

Looking up into Bill's face, she knew she had made a mistake. Nothing dramatic had happened, only a slight tightening. But she knew. She had never been able to tell, with Bill, when things would bounce off or sink in. Beneath his toughness were so many deep places, both tender and ugly. In a way he was not nearly as tough as she, because so much of his toughness was a lashing out to cover weakness. She had thought for a long time they were the same kind of person, but there was so much she didn't understand in him. She had to a degree the same contempt for people who hadn't made the grade, but his contempt was so much more violent, extending to the people who worked for him, and sometimes, she thought, to all people who worked for anyone but themselves. "Goddam slaves," he would say, and it was no joke with him. She had called him on it once when she had been working in Los Angeles, and they had had a bad fight. There had been so many fights, hadn't there? There had been so many times when she had seen awful caricatures of her own attitudes in him, when she had become furious and disgusted with him, shamed and disgusted with herself; so many times when she had resolved to end it, but never had, except in her mind. Till now. She must do it now.

During the war there had been his evasion of the draft—if

he had evaded the draft. She had never been sure. She knew he had trouble with flat feet, but he had bragged that he had got from a doctor some pills to simulate a heart ailment whenever he was called for a physical.

"Why don't you join the WACs if you're so damn patriotic," he had said, and she had thought about that and had seen her own hypocrisy. She knew what she had gone through to get where she was, but he had gone through more, working as an elevator operator and a janitor and a service-station attendant, and hating so much taking orders from someone else, saving and saving until he had enough for a down payment on a service station of his own in San Diego, and struggling to make the payments and to buy a few old wrecks to sell on the side, and finally selling the station at a good profit and putting all the profit into cars and carrying a terrible load of bank loans and almost going under month after month after month—twelve years of it. Then at last came the war, and he was safe and making money. Did she expect him to throw away those twelve terrible years to go fight in a war he knew little about and cared less?

"But it's your country fighting!" she had said to him once. "Your country's given you everything you have. Aren't you grateful? I'd think you'd want to—"

"Gave me everything, hell," Bill had said. "Nobody gave me anything."

She had been able to convince herself that he was draft-exempt because of his feet, and that all his talk was only because he felt guilty at not being in the Service, and so he had to make a show of cynicism. He did feel guilty about it, she had seen that in him a thousand times. But if he had ridden roughshod over his conscience, she had tricked hers.

And now she had hurt him, and when he was hurt he was likely to dish it back with interest.

"Of course he must have halfway known for a long time," she said. "That's why. No kid is going to like his mother's—" She let the term go.

Bill said nothing. His grin snapped on again when the

waitress returned with their orders, and she considered that grin. She found it attractive, yet with very little modification it became his hard, dangerous grin of anger, or the triumphant grin she hated when he had beaten someone on a business deal and was bragging about it. Probably her own smile was very like it. She watched him eat his eggs, dipping a piece of toast into the broken yolks.

"You sure he knows about us?" Bill asked casually.

"I'm sure."

"So what do you want me to do? Talk to him?"

"No. I have to talk to him. But I have to have a talking point. Which is that it's all over. It is, Bill. It's been over for a long time now."

Bill only grunted, without looking up from his plate.

She felt the migraine constricting her forehead again, and she found herself very close to hating him. But she could not kid herself into thinking that she had hated him all along. She had loved him; at one time she had seriously considered marrying him; she had been his mistress for almost a quarter of her life, even after he had married Bea. But now she could look at the whole affair historically, coldly, as though it were a line on a graph, seeing the line rising gradually through the years to the point, six years ago, when he had asked her to marry him and she had considered it and even talked to Keith about it, letting Keith's dislike of Bill act as the brake she had needed. From that point the line on the graph started slowly downward, with a sharp jig down just before Bill had married Bea, then a slight upward thrust after the marriage; then down again, and in the last two years down steeply, so that last year he had come around almost only when he had had a fight with Bea and more often than not merely for an evening of dinner, dancing, drinking, and talk of old times. This year there were no check points at all on the graph. Just before Christmas had been the last time, when she had been lonely and he had been mad at Bea or that busty blonde he was keeping now. But that Christmas episode hung on her conscience, black and heavy; because by then there had been nothing left

except a casual and animal accommodation, each for the other, and she had been angry because Keith had not come down for Christmas but had gone skiing in the Sierras with some fraternity brothers—when all through the years she had shifted Keith from grandmother to aunt to boarding school to summer camp, to keep him off her back and later out of the way of herself and Bill. She blamed herself for that cosy little business at Christmas time more than all the rest because she would not excuse herself for it. Now the end of that part of her life had to be marked clearly in time, for Bill—so there would be no more Christmas times—for Keith, and for herself.

"Yeah," Bill said and nodded, to what she had said or to what he himself had just been thinking. "Well, we've had a lot of good times."

She nodded too.

"My God! It's been nine years, hasn't it?"

"About."

"We should have got married that time. I've thought about it a lot."

She shook her head. "It would still have been over, Bill. It's pooped out the way things do. I haven't got it for you any more. And you haven't got it for me."

She saw the tightening in his face again. She had said the second wrong thing. She knew better than that too; she knew how he took any reflection on his appeal to women or his ability in bed. She was doing very badly.

His eyes met hers almost without interest. He lifted his coffee cup and sipped. "So?" he said.

"Bill, I want you to try and understand me now. Will you try? And not get mad?"

"Sure. Why the hell should I get mad?"

"It's all finished between us," she said, staring into his eyes. "That's what I want you to get straight. No more coming around for old time's sake. See, I have to make it definite now so I can tell—" She stopped. Then she said, "For a lot of reasons, this is the end of the movie, Bill."

He grinned, hard and flat, and his knee pressed hers under

the table. "Going through the change?" he said.

She jerked her knee away. "Maybe I am," she said and grimaced back at him. Maybe I am, she thought, all at once; but not in the way he had meant. She said tightly, "Have I communicated at all?"

"Sure." His face grew solemn. "Sure, I read you loud and clear, Hat. Sure, I know it's over too. Okay, Hat."

She let herself relax a little. She should have known he would be a good guy about it—and that he would tease her. That was all it was. Shakily she lit another cigarette. "You've got your wife and boy," she said.

He gave her a sneering, disgusted look. It was a familiar look. She thought of all the familiar things, of all the varying degrees and kinds of emotion she had felt for him. Once it had been a real and continuing passion. Always there had been a constant of admiration. It was not gone even yet, but year by year it had become more and more qualified and strained; more and more there had been things about him she couldn't take, and somewhere along the line a revulsion at herself had begun to grow.

"We should have got married that time," Bill said abruptly. "Now everything's gone to hell."

She found herself nodding to the second statement; but she was struck by the repetition of the first, cast back, against her will, to the day when she had told him she would not marry him. "Let's just go along the way we are," she had said. She had tried to make the rejection flip, and he had replied to it fliply, but behind his joking and his teasing she had seen the deep, defenceless hurt. Her eyes ached suddenly, remembering that; and she thought of the fifty thousand dollars.

He had lent it to her six months or a year before he had asked her to marry him, on an unsecured promissory note, no interest, to start her shops and to design and manufacture a line of women's sports clothes. The line had failed quickly—she had been a success at selling everything but the clothes she herself designed. The shops were going strong, on Bill's money. And she had been hoping to convince Keith that her



affair with Bill had been over for some time, and that that sort of thing was common enough. Common—it was a word her mother liked to use. And maybe Bill had meant the fifty-thousand-dollar loan as a kind of marriage bond, which she had reneged on. But even then, at the height of the affair, she knew that deep down she had not really wanted to marry him. She had used Keith as her excuse to herself, worked Keith almost as a kind of competitive suitor for her hand, got Keith into a mental frazzle about herself and men, so that now—

She watched Bill cutting the last of his ham into little squares. So often she had told herself she'd better get that note changed to a term one, and Smitty, Bill's lawyer, had advised her to, but she had always put it off, afraid that a suggestion of regularizing the business affairs between them might somehow cause Bill to try to turn back to their withering non-business affairs.

"We've come a long way, haven't we?" she said, and her voice sounded like the voice of someone she didn't know.

"We sure have," Bill said. "Since you were a little dress buyer and I was just keeping my head out of the water with a couple of lots out on University. Hell yes, we've come along!" It was not what she had meant. "Say, Hat, did I tell you what I'm into now? One of the non-sched air-coach lines. Pacific Air. It was folding, and a couple of other boys and I picked it up for pennies. We'll have to shoot a lot of stuff into it, but I'm going to start handling airplane tickets at all my lots—neighbourhood service, phone orders, and delivery. That'll help us off the nut a little. Money in plane tickets now."

"That's fine, Bill."

"Well, you've sure come on too, Hat. Shops going great, uh?"

"With your help," she said. Bill's knee brushed hers again. She dropped her cigarette butt into her cup and frowned down at it. When she had been a waitress in Eddie Weir's Café in New York, trying to break into modelling, she had hated the customers who did that. Eddie Weir's Café—when had that been? 1937? She had gone to New York to carve it into a shape to fit her, but the carving had been slow, hard, and

heartbreaking; that had been the bottom. She wondered if she'd had any doubts about anything then.

"Sure," Bill said. "A little help from me. But your brains, Hat. That was hard luck about that line of bikinis though." After it had failed, he had always called the sports-clothes line a line of bikinis, although there had been only one moderately skimpy bathing suit in it. His eyes, light blue, flat, slightly slanted, brushed hers for a moment before they moved on across the room, where a blonde, young and attractive in a beige gaberdine suit, was drinking coffee alone. There was a slight frown on his face, and she could read it. He wasn't thinking about the blonde. He was thinking about the promissory note, worrying about the money, trying to remember how much it was now, wondering if she had sneaked around and got first mortgages on everything, wondering if his money was safe. And maybe he was thinking that any time he wanted to demand payment he could close her down.

"Since we're only business acquaintances now," she said, "maybe we ought to be more businesslike. I want to pay you interest from now on. In case you haven't checked lately, the principal's down to thirty-eight five. If you want I'll give you some mortgages. I own the building in Coronado and I'm into my house about five thousand. I couldn't cover much more than half the principal, but it would be some protection for you."

His eyes came back and inspected her, and there was no old-lovers'-good-bye foolishness now; he was sharp and wary. "Hell, I don't know, Hat. You got a mortgage on the Coronado store?"

"A little one. I can clear it out any time."

She watched him thinking it over. On the one hand there were the interest and security. On the other hand the demand note gave him the power to knock her down at any time. But he ought to know that she would make good on that note if she had to walk the streets—no, that was an unhappy cliché—get down on her hands and knees and scrub floors.

"Oh, hell no, honey," he said and reached across the table

to pat her hand. "I wouldn't feel right taking interest from you. I made you take that loan, remember? I wanted you down in San Diego. And I was as revved up about that line of bikinis as you were. I'm not going to ask you for interest or collateral when it was like that. Uh-uh."

She was unable to meet his eyes. It seemed a terrible thing that she had to be so suspicious, that she couldn't just believe what he had said, that she must question his sincerity. She stared down at the dark soaked corpse of the cigarette in her cup.

Finally she said, "Thanks, Bill. You've been—" There was no way to complete that yet. She slid out of the booth and got to her feet. "Well, I guess I'll be on my way."

"Sorry about the kid," Bill said.

She nodded.

"See you, Hat," he said.

She could feel him watching her as she walked down the aisle. She beckoned to the waitress and asked her for her check. "Gentleman back there and I are going to dutch treat," she said. The waitress watched her as she went to pay the cashier, probably pitying her because the gentleman back there had kissed her off—or so it might appear—and because she was thirty-seven years old and must look every day of it.

But her migraine seemed a little easier as she started the drive home to Mardios Beach. Maybe it was just crowded out by all the other headaches. She did not drive rapidly, holding the speedometer needle to a steady fifty. She found a Kleenex in her purse and blew her nose, and remembered her grandmother, who had blown her nose as a child. Always think the best of people—it had been one of her grandmother's homilies, the dear old soul. Her own motto had been just the opposite. But she would try to think the best of Bill, because there was nothing else to do. And now she would have to talk to Keith, to be straight and honest and frank with him; no more beating around the edges of old sins. Bill mattered, of course, because the shops mattered—all the work, the worry, the years, all of herself that she had put into them mattered—but Keith

mattered a hell of a lot more. "Let me tell you, son," she said suddenly aloud, "what a lousy money-making bitch I've been.

"Money," she said. She had worked all her debts out in terms of cash, hadn't she? The thirty-eight five she owed Bill—but that was all right, those were the terms he understood too. The two hundred a month she sent her mother. When she had gone to New York in 1737 she had sent each month what she could to help pay Keith's way. This had gradually increased to two hundred dollars, which she had continued to send even when Keith had left his grandmother's to live with Lorraine and John Willis, even when she had sent for Keith to come to Los Angeles. A kind of payment to her mother for the disappointment that she, Hattie, had not turned out as her mother had wanted—like Lorraine, married to Galesburg's society doctor, women's clubs and big hats and dowdy clothes and respectability; two hundred dollars a month to pay that debt. And for her debt to Keith the best private boarding schools in Los Angeles—the best that money could buy. It was easy to figure it out on a money basis, wasn't it?

The highway swung down and to the west, and suddenly the ocean came into view, dark blue, curving out and away over the far shoulder of the world, with a few scattered clouds dropping shadows on its surface. How many miles out that way to Korea? She'd given that silly kid hell about his grades. But if he didn't make his grades, into the Army he'd go, maybe go to Korea, where the stalemate could break out into bloody violence again any day, and—

She came into Mardios and turned down Ocean Avenue. She slowed as she approached the little two-bedroomed house on the beach that she'd paid too much for, that she only a quarter owned, that, if he wanted to, Bill—Keith's car was not in the garage. "Damn it!" she said.

She drove on. Probably he was at the beach. His car—a present to her from Bill; oh yes, that was another thing—was parked in the lot above the boardwalk, along with Dick Bannerman's red pickup, a station wagon, another convertible. She parked, got out, and walked over to the boardwalk, where she

leaned on the railing. There were two or three people in swimming, a young couple lying on a blanket, backs to the sun. Keith was not in sight. "Damn it," she said again. Then she saw Dick Bannerman standing out on the pier in faded trunks, holding a pair of swim fins.

Her heels cracked on the weathered planks as she went out on the pier to meet him. He saw her and waved, a big, deeply tanned man with a chest like a wrestler's. He slapped the fins against his leg as he moved toward her. The pier quivered from the waves smashing in along the piles.

"Hello, Hattie."

"Hello, Dick. Seen Keith?"

"Well, there are signs of innocent passion in that inlet down the cliff a way. I don't like being a stool pigeon though."

She half turned to look, turned back. "Oh," she said. "Oh, he's got his girl friend with him. Well—"

"Something wrong, Hattie?"

"Some things are catching up with me somewhat." She glanced at him and tried to grin. He was leaning against the railing beside her. If you cared for that sort of thing his was a very broad chest for weeping on. She had known him only a year or so, but he was a good friend and a drinking companion of many evenings at the Jacaranda. Keith said he was the best guy he knew—the best older guy, he had added—Keith, who didn't have a father.

Watching the white surging swell beneath the pier, she remembered when Lorraine had written about adopting Keith. The letter had mentioned how good it would be for Keith to have a father, especially such a fine man as Doctor John Willis. She had felt a strange, intense jealousy of John Willis then. But Keith seemed to view his uncle as she did, as a fathead; it had pleased her that Keith was apt to see things and look at people in the same way she did. But not always. She closed her eyes briefly.

She said, "I'm sure there's been a good deal of local gossip about Bill Gregory and me," and waited. They looked down at the water together.

"Not lately," Dick said.

"Well, it's got to Keith," she said. "He knows. It finally got around to him. Damn it! Well, I don't know why I have to apologize to you because I'm the town bad lady, but—"

"Well, hardly that, Hattie."

"—this morning I had a talk with Bill and we're all finished. I guess it's kind of late in the game as far as Keith's concerned."

"The Gregorys," Dick said in a strange voice. Then he said "Anything I can do? I think I'm a pretty good friend of Keith's."

"He thinks so too. He'll be wanting to tell his troubles to someone—just as I am. If it's you, give me a break, will you?"

"You didn't need to ask."

She turned to smile crookedly at him, feeling very teary. Above his big body his head was small and neat, with a thin sunburned nose, an almost catlike mouth that curled up at the corners in a perpetually ironic grin, small ears set close, and black cropped hair angling sharply back from a prominent widow's peak. He was looking at her with concern, and with affection that was nothing more than that. It seemed a very valuable thing.

"Don't say I should have told Keith about it long ago," she said, "I know it." "Hard to do."

"I should have though," she said. "And I should have made a thing of breaking it off with Bill long ago, instead of letting it slide along." She looked intently down at the young couple on the sand, tanned, and oiled against the sun. "I had to get it definite with Bill just now because Keith found out. That seemed the urgent thing. But there was more to it than that. Finding I'm not very proud of the life I've been leading and that I really do give a damn about what people think of me. And that I give a damn what I have to think about myself."

"Just for my curiosity," Dick said, "how did Bill take it?"

"I don't know. I don't know yet. But I owe him a lot of money, and if he's unhappy he can just about ruin me financially."

"Financially," Dick said, and she gritted her teeth a little. He was three or four years younger than she; he had gone to college; he probably hadn't even noticed the depression flitting past; he could say "financially" in that tone of voice. But he was right.

"Yes, financially," she said. "My shops. What a crumb of a mother I've been with my career and my shops! Keep the children out from under foot so you can make money." She felt returning twinges of the migraine. "My shops," she said and put the heels of her hands to either side of her forehead and squeezed. "How old are you, Dick?" she asked.

"Thirty-four."

"Well, you're humming along and getting fat building those houses," she said. "Let an old pro give you some advice. Or maybe it's philosophy. This is a great country. Someone like you or me or Bill can work himself up to where you are or I am or he is, and a hell of a lot further. You can do it, but you don't do it with lily-white hands. You can go, but you pay for the ticket. You have to sell something, or mortgage something. I've just realized that Bill owns a piece of me. I don't mean the money I owe him, and I don't mean this thing I've got holding up a twenty-four-seventy-five summer model. I mean a piece of my soul, if you'll pardon the expression."

"Pretty useful expression," Dick said. "You're in a self-chastening mood, of course, but I really don't think the devils are coming to drag you off screaming. And don't worry too much about Keith. He's got a level head. Somebody did a fair job raising him."

"Assorted grandmothers, aunts, boarding schools, camps, and military academies," she said and bit her lip. "Not me." She swung around to look toward the inlet down the cliff. She couldn't see into it from here. "I guess it's not the time to interrupt and drag him home to tell him sad stories, is it?"

"Probably not."

The migraine swelled in her head like a very slowly exploding bomb. "So I'll go home and wait," she said. "I'd better go lie down anyway. I've got a headache that would kill a horse."

"Good luck," Dick said behind her, as she went back along the pier at her rapid, jolting pace, each step jarring painfully in her head. She prayed that Keith would come home soon so she could have it out and over with, and prayed that it would be all right.

## Saturday 4

WHEN Hattie had gone Bill Gregory got the cute waitress to bring him another cup of coffee. But after he'd drunk a couple of sips he checked out of Musso's and got his car from the garage under the radio station and started on a tour of the lots. It was a tour he'd already made once this week, but it was a good idea to fall in on the lots when they weren't expecting him, to check the inventories against the cars themselves, spot-check deals, throw the fear of God into the managers and salesmen. He also wanted to figure how much paper he was carrying. He could theoretically run to the bank on each deal and borrow on a floor-plan loan up to ninety per cent of the value of the car he was taking in. Actually he had found it a waste of time to work that way, because it was hard on the managers, and it was restricting, when it was necessary to 'take in a real dog or make what looked on paper to be a bad trade. He liked best being in a position where he could hedge, carrying a certain amount of paper because of the interest involved and the freedom it gave him, but also farming a lot of deals out to the bank to share the risk and keep his own capital working at a better percentage. He preserved the proportion of bank loans to his own cash by an intuitive formula based on what the business letters had to say, his own opinion about the health of business, and his mood of the moment.

He drove first to Fourteenth and F, then to the Logan lot



and the National City lot, around the southwestern outskirts of San Diego to Forty-eighth and El Cajon, out to La Mesa, back along the Mission Valley road and up the freeway to the University lot, and finally downtown again to the State Street lot, where there was an adding machine. The inventory was a little heavier than he liked, sales were down but not enough to worry about, everything okay really, no worries at all except for the offer he'd got on the Forty-eighth and El Cajon property, where they wanted to put in a supermarket. It was a good offer, and he ought to be looking around for another lot to move to. He didn't feel like doing it today. Even the tour of the lots hadn't made him feel good. He felt lousy today, with all kinds of things eating at him. Days like this, when he waked up with a hangover, he'd catch himself worrying about his heart and liver and about cancer and everything else.

Ardath should have got home from LA last night. He drove fast out of town, toward her apartment, which was on the hill overlooking downtown San Diego. He wasn't going to think about Hattie. To hell with Hattie. Anyway, as she had said, it was all over. He'd known that, for God's sake. But if she thought he was going to crump on that note as well as kiss him off—Smitty had the note in the safe-deposit vault at the bank so he couldn't see it till Monday, but it was a promissory note all right, and all he had to do was call it. He remembered the night he had worked it out to lend Hattie dough to start her shops; she hadn't wanted to take the money much, he had to remember that. Hattie wasn't the kind to bail out of anything anyway. He knew Hattie. You don't have it for me any more, she had said, just like that. He gripped the wheel tightly, driving too fast up Sixth Street past the park.

He stopped in front of the new brick apartment house. Ardath's Buick was parked in front. As he walked past it he saw the skinned fender. "Goddam it," he said through his teeth. He went through the lobby to the elevator and pressed the button for the top floor, snapping his fingers as the elevator rose slowly. He strode down the dim, soft-carpeted hall. "Mrs. Ardath McIlhenny," said the neat little card over her bell.

He rang the bell, waited, got out his key and opened the door. The sun blazed into the living room through the wide plate-glass window. He could see San Diego laid out below him, the cars very small and slow moving on Sixth Street, the park immense and green, the cluster of tall buildings rising downtown, ferries passing in the channel between the foot of Highway 101 and Coronado, the gaunt gray Navy ships lying in the bay. A seaplane was taking off, leaving a long milky wake. He looked around him at the apartment that cost him two hundred and fifteen dollars a month, at the fancy furniture that had cost him four thousand. He had told Smitty to find a way to snick that rent money off his income tax, and Smitty had laughed and said, "As a business establishment, charity, or another dependent?"

"Is that you, Billy?" Ardath's sleepy voice called from the bedroom. She was still in bed, for God's sake, at two o'clock in the afternoon.

He went into the bedroom. She was just getting out of the seven-foot-square Hollywood bed, and it was something to see—like a big yacht being launched. She was stretching, yawning, her body hairless and white in a transparent nightgown. She was as tall as he; her thirty-eight-inch bust was like a football cut in half with the halves stuck on her chest, and that little can that fit right into the palms of your two hands. She threw her arms around him and kissed him and hugged him against her. Her face was fat and soggy with sleep, unhealthily white without makeup. It looked like old dough. And she'd been up in LA seeing McIlhenny.

He pulled himself away from her. "When'd you get back?"

"Some horrible hour last night, Billy. Three or four o'clock. The traffic was just—"

"What happened to your fender?"

"Oh, Billy, I don't know!" she wailed. "Somebody must have scraped it when I was parked up there. Isn't it awful?"

"Somebody scraped it, hell. You scraped it. I don't know why you can't learn how to drive."

"Billy, this is just an awful way to greet me when I've missed

you so! It was so awful and hot up there. I was miserable the whole time." She yawned. With the backs of her fingers she began patting the flesh under her chin. Her fingers made a steady, small, splatting sound. "Did you miss me, doll?"

"Sure I missed you." He didn't like to look at her face when she had just gotten up. It was a hell of a sight. And her bleached hair with the bobby pins sticking out of it. She ought to wear a sack over her head when she'd just got up. In about an hour, after she'd taken a shower, patted and pushed at her face, worked cream and gunk into it and painted it, it would be back in shape again, but till then it turned his stomach. He listened to the steady patting of her fingers under her chin, and felt the pressure rising inside him and knew he was going to blow at the word boo. "You and Mac have a good time?" he asked.

"Well, he promised to send me the money. I told him if he didn't send it next week I was going to go to the district attorney again. He's going to send me the money. Now, you're not going to be jealous of Mac again, are you, Billy?"

"Don't call me Billy!"

"Darling, what is the matter? You're awfully edgy. I just won't let you be jealous of poor old Mac."

"Take your shower. I'm going out and make myself a drink."

"Give me a big kiss first. There. Now, I'm just not going to let you be this way. You're like a big porcupine when you get this way. Do you want to go to bed and play a little, Billy?"

"No," he said, "not now. I want a drink." He swung around and went into the living room, took off his jacket, and slung it over the back of a basket chair. He made himself a stiff scotch in the kitchen and sat looking out the window, wondering what the hell was the matter with him. He thought of Ardath teasing around with that no-good ex-husband of hers whom he'd never seen, and he thought of Hattie, and of Bea last night—all the goddam women. He ought to take a vacation for a month and go fishing somewhere up in the mountains a hundred miles from the nearest woman. Recharge his batteries,

lose a couple of pounds, get a little tan. What was the matter with him anyway? Maybe he was sick, really sick. But how the hell could anybody want to climb in bed when they had to look at a face like that? He heard the shower running in the bathroom.

When she came out he was sitting in the living room, finishing his third drink. In a low-cut flowered sunback that showed the creamy cleavage between her breasts, her hair carefully combed, her face made up into a soft, pleasant marshmallow trimmed with startlingly red lips and heavily darkened eyes, she looked fine, but he had been thinking of Hattie, and of Bea, and suddenly it seemed to him that he had been trading down, that he had traded a good clean Cadillac for some kind of foreign car without any engine, and then traded that for a damn souped-up Model A with one of those fibreglass bodies.

Ardath walked over to him with that swaying, mincing walk that gravelled him so—as though she were protecting some wonderful secret between her legs—sat down on his lap, smiled, laid one of her soft hands against his cheek, and kissed him. “Now,” she said, “I’m never going away again because something’s got my honey down just terribly while I’ve been gone. Tell me what’s wrong, Billy.”

He handed her his glass. “Go make me another drink and I’ll tell you.”

She swayed out into the kitchen with his glass. He sat looking out at the ships in the bay, and he felt like hell.

Ardath came back with his scotch, pulled up a footstool, and sat on it; she leaned forward toward him so that he could see down the front of her dress. “Now,” she said, smiling.

“Aren’t we happy?” he said.

“Good, you’re feeling better!” she said. “I knew all you needed was a drink.”

“That’s all I needed, hon. Makes me think how lucky I am. A crummy red-headed bum from Tustin, and look at me now—so fat with dough I don’t know what to do with it all till next income-tax quarter. Three hundred and ten, or

maybe it's twenty, cars. Property all over the place, stocks, airplanes, radio stations. House. This apartment. Fine wife, fine little boy. And you, the best lay in California. Lucky! Luck, hard work, and brains—that's what it takes."

Ardath's smile faded.

He grinned at her. "Do you love me, hon?"

"You know I do, Billy. Bill, what's the mat—"

"Of course you do," he interrupted. "My God, the bills I pay you ought to. But don't think I'm complaining, hon. Cheap at half the price, a body like that one you wear around. The best that money can buy, and I'm the boy that can afford it. My God, yes. And you love me so much, don't you, hon? Of course there's a little left over for that pimping McIlhenny, like only about a hundred per cent."

"That's not true and you know it," Ardath said. She got to her feet and turned away. He patted her behind. She moved farther away. "I'm just not going to talk to you when you're like this," she said. "Every time you get into a fight with that bitchy wife of yours you take it out on me. I'm not—"

"If you ever call Bea a bitch again," he said softly, "I'll kick that little butt of yours right off."

"Why don't you go home to her then? I'd just as soon you went home to her if you' going to be like this."

"I'll tell you where I'd like to go. I'd like to go to one of those places they don't allow any women. Only a bunch of dirty, smelly monks. Where it's clean and smells good."

Ardath went back into the bedroom, and he could hear her crying. He drank his scotch. He was feeling a little better. When Ardath came out her face was red and the mascara was running in dark dribbles from her eyes. My God, that face; now it would be another hour. He looked at her and patted his fingers beneath her chin.

"Get out of here!" Ardath yelled. "You're beastly."

"Call Smitty for me, will you, hon? Tell him to get up here. I've got to talk to him "

"If you're going to stay here I'm going out!"

He gave her a sick-cow look. "Don't leave me, hon."

She stood there working her hands together.

"I'm sorry I was so mean," he said. "I was feeling pretty bad."

She came over and sat on his lap and leaned her head on his chest. He could see the dark roots along the part of her blond hair. "You were awfully mean," she whispered. "Bill, you mustn't ever say things like that to me again. You know I can't stand Mac. But I just had to see him. He was more than a month behind on his alimony."

"How about calling Smitty for me?"

"What do you want to talk to that old Smitty about, Billy?"

Some time when she called him Billy he was going to swat her one, and then she probably wouldn't ever do it again. He said, "Oh, about a little loan I made a while ago."

"You're feeling better now, dear, aren't you?"

"Feel great. Go on, get going and call Smitty."

The phone was in the bedroom so she wouldn't have to get up if it rang while she was in bed. She spent a lot of time in bed. She got up late and, when she could, went to bed early. She had had the big Admiral TV he had bought her put in the bedroom, where she could watch it from her bed, lying on top of the covers in some transparent thing or other, drinking Cokes or eating apples or smoking, happy as a dead bird. He had a lot of respect for her. She collected three hundred dollars a month from McIlhenny, which she banked, and she ran up bills of five or six hundred bucks a month, which he, Bill Gregory, paid. The hours were not long, the work easy, and she enjoyed it—or seemed to enjoy it.

He stared out the window at San Diego, and everything he had done, or owned, or had ever liked or enjoyed, was garbage.

When Smitty knocked, Ardath was still in the bedroom, getting made up again, and probably changing her clothes. When she felt bad she changed her clothes. He called to Smitty to come in, not rising, and Smitty entered, a neat, slight young man with a sarcastic grin and disbelieving gray eyes.

"Well, Bill?" he said.

"Hi," he said and stared at Smitty. The pearl-gray suit, like all Smitty's suits, fitted him perfectly. Whatever Smitty wore he looked irritatingly smooth and correct. For a while he had tried to buy similar clothes. But however much money he spent, and he had even gone to Smitty's tailor, the clothes did not look on him as they looked on Smitty, and finally he had given it up. Smitty didn't seem very happy about being called.

"Get you away from your golf game?" he said.

"No," Smitty said. "What's the problem?" He sank into the foam-rubber couch with an easy, graceful motion, loosening the knees of the pearl-gray trousers. Smitty looked at him with polite disinterest.

"Want a drink?"

"Attractive thought. Yes."

"Liquor's in the kitchen."

One of Smitty's eyebrows arched as he rose. He, Bill, held out his own glass. "Sweeten this up for me too, will you, Smitty?"

When Smitty came back with the two glasses Bill said, "That note of Hattie's—what do you think about it?"

"I didn't draw it up, if you'll remember. It's all right. Perfectly legal and binding. Why?"

"I was just thinking about it."

"Trouble with Hattie?"

"None of your goddam business."

Smitty pouted thoughtfully, nodded. "She sends in a check for at least three hundred every month, although no monthly payment is specified and—"

"I can call it any time I want to, can't I?"

"Yes," Smitty said.

He took a long drink. The good twelve-dollar-a-bottle scotch went down easy and warm, but he knew he'd had too much. His voice sounded fuzzy when he spoke. "About thirty-eight five left, isn't there?"

"I'm not sure. About that."

"Think Hat could borrow that much from a bank?"

"I don't know enough about her business."

**"What do you think?"**

**"I doubt it."**

**"What do you think about the note?"**

Smitty sat looking at him, frowning a little. He no longer looked amused and distant. Smitty didn't like him much, he knew that. But Smitty was damn glad to be working for him. Smitty came when he was called, gave advice when he was asked for it, fixed the income tax pretty much as he was told, picked up his check every month. That was the system, wasn't it? What more did he want than that?

**"What you think about note, I said?"**

**"It's none of my goddam business,"** Smitty said mildly.

**"Yeah, it is now. Just asked you."**

**"No interest, unsecured. You not only don't make anything on it, you lose on dollar depreciation. Hattie—"**

**"She wants to pay interest."**

Smitty looked as though he'd just figured the whole deal out. He nodded. **"And since it's unsecured you might demand an insurance policy to pay it off in case of her death. I don't much like promissory notes, but I don't think I'd ever worry about Hattie paying off. But maybe it would be a good idea to have it changed over to a—"**

**"Like her a lot, uh?"**

**"Yes, I like her, Bill."**

**"Like her a lot,"** he repeated thickly. He took another drink. A little of it trickled down his chin, and he wiped it away. **"Say, Smitty, tell me something, willye? You been in there, Schmee?"**

Smitty's eyelids sagged, his lips tightened, then tilted into a faint smile. **"No,"** he said, **"I just happen to like her, Bill."**

Ardath came in. She had changed her clothes all right. Smitty got quickly to his feet, smiled at her, said, **"Looking very wonderful, Ardath. New dress?"**

**"I got it in Los Angeles. Do you like it, Smitty?"**

**"Very attractive,"** Smitty said. When he talked to women he always gave the impression of bowing slightly. He remained standing.



Ardath came over to the basket chair. She looked enormously tall, standing above him. The new dress was of some blue shiny stuff, all smooth over her hips and waist and then swelling dramatically outward over her breasts, which were like some kind of wonderful rolling mountains and also like a barrier to be reached and surmounted and passed—and above and beyond them, so far away, the white puffy cloud of a face like the final goal, that, when you reached it, was nothing you wanted, just a lot of makeup.

Her hand patted his arm. "Billy, you're way ahead of me, drinking so fast. I'm going to have to hurry to catch up, aren't I?"

"Doan cal Billy," he said.

"What, dear?"

"Gahamimmen," he said. "Gamimmen, alls atteryou'natter you, an—"

"I don't understand you, dear."

They both looked so tall, both of them gazing down at him from space, the one towering in blue, the other in gray, their faces swimming in the distance; beneath them he felt squashed down and immobilized in the basket chair. He shook his head to try to clear it. Smitty had that damn smile on his face.

"Okay," he said. "Okay. Assall, Schmee. See you."

"Oh, Smitty hasn't even finished his drink, dear!"

"Beat it," he said, Smitty nodded, adjusted his shoulders in the pearl-gray coat, smiled, said good-bye to Ardath, and left.

"Hon," he said to Ardath. "Go bed, hon. Hon." He looked up pleadingly toward her white, vague, distant face. It seemed an enormous effort to rise but finally he did; he clutched at the back of the chair and stood erect, waiting for the room to come to rest.

"What were you and Smitty saying about Hattie, darling?" Ardath said. "I couldn't hear." She had hold of his arm.

"Saying damn fine woman. Damn fine. Wouldn't do—hell no. Come on, hon, less go, less go, less go. No, lem lone. Can walk for Chrissake."

He started for the bedroom and heard Ardath cry out, and the floor hit him so hard it felt as though all his flesh had been torn off his bones. He lay on the floor and groaned. Nothing had ever hurt so much. He was dying. And Bea was there now, pretty little Bea, crying because he was going to kick off and because she'd been so damn mean and cold when she really loved him, kissing him and crying like her heart was broken, and he whispered to her, Bea, honey, Bea, Jesus, Bea, I've been a real dog, but I love you, honey, and I love that kid and I've always loved you, honey. It's just everything kept going wrong and there were so many things— *Where the hell was he?*

Ardath's hand tugged at his arm. "Bill, are you all right?"

"All righ," he said. "Just trip. Just trip a lil." He got to his knees, aching all over, everything inside him aching and raw but not from any fall. "No, I can make it," he said and managed to stand up alone.

Looking anxiously into his face, her arm around him, Ardath moved with him toward the bedroom. It seemed across the world.

## Saturday 5

RICHARD BANNERMAN sat at the card table in the alcove off his living room and watched the sun drop down out of a range of clouds above the horizon. It hung there a moment, round and red, then gradually it began to flatten at the bottom until it looked like a red half-orange in a squeezer. It sent a long freckled column of fire across the ocean toward him, pushed down farther and farther on the knife edge of the horizon until only a hot sliver of red showed and the column pointing toward him faded—then the sun completely gone and the column of fire gone, and the evening settled in. He

put on his glasses again, switched on the floor lamp that peered over his shoulder, and went back to work on his accounts.

It was almost nine o'clock when a car came into his driveway with a squeal of brakes and a glare of headlights. The headlights went off so quickly he couldn't see who it was or make out the car. A door slammed, then another, and footsteps scraped on the porch. He got up to open the door.

"Hi," Keith said, standing in the doorway in a letter sweater, a crumpled, greasy pair of Levis that looked as though they had been used as a rag to wipe an oil bayonet, and scuffed moccasins. With him was a pretty girl in a red and black dress—the girl Keith had squired around last summer, Mary-something, Douglas Bogan's niece. She was wearing a fraternity pin on the tip of one breast. She seemed sulky.

"Say, Dick, you know Mary-Lynn, don't you?" Keith said. His breath smelled of whisky. "Mary-Lynn Sieber? This is Dick Bannerman, Mary-Lynn."

"Hello, Mary-Lynn," he said. The girl gave him an uncertain smile and hugged her handbag against her chest. "Won't you come in?" He stood aside.

Keith backed up awkwardly, and the girl entered, glancing at him out of the corners of her eyes as she passed him. Keith followed her in. "Say, I'm sorry to bother you, Dick," Keith said in a fuzzy, apologetic voice, "but I've got a kind of problem. I thought I'd—" Keith stopped and dug his hands into his pockets, where they made round tight bulges like baseballs.

Mary-Lynn was looking around the room, taking a quick inventory. "Sit down, Mary-Lynn," he said. "Keith."

They sat together on the couch, the girl primly, handbag in her lap, Keith with his long legs stretched out and his feet slipped half out of his moccasins, staring down at his knees with an almost comically fierce scowl. Keith grasped Mary-Lynn's hand, and she flushed and looked even more ill at ease.

He sat down opposite the two of them, took off his glasses, and waited for Keith to tell him about Hattie and Bill Gregory. He wondered why Keith had brought the girl; probably, he

thought, as a defence, to keep this slightly impersonal, to keep it on his, Keith's, terms.

"Say, Dick," Keith said. "Could we have a drink? I'm not going to get drunk or anything stupid like that, but could we have a drink?"

"Beer?"

"I guess a bourbon highball. I can't get a drink anywhere else around here," Keith said, although obviously he had. But the statement and the sickly grin that accompanied it were evidently meant to cover what he, Richard Bannerman, had witnessed last night.

"Mary-Lynn?" he said.

"I'd like a highball too, please."

He went into the kitchen and mixed two weak highballs and one strong one. He gave the girl and Keith the weak ones, took his chair again, and assumed an attitude of attention. He supposed he might make this easier for Keith by initiating the subject, but felt that it might not be a good idea to make any of it easier. Except that Keith was coming to him for advice and help—like Bea Gregory. He suddenly remembered the seal and the fanciful thoughts it had brought up this morning. He felt tense suddenly, as though he were at the plate with the bat on his shoulder and the pitcher was winding up.

Keith took a long drink, then, holding his glass in one hand and the girl's hand in the other, said, "Well, Mary-Lynn says everybody in Mardios knows about Hattie and Bill Gregory. But I just figured it out."

Mary-Lynn frowned down at her glass. He nodded to Keith, said nothing.

"I guess it sounds pretty stupid," Keith said and drew his lips back white against his teeth. "It's been that way since I was a little kid, I guess. But I was always away at school or summer camp or something. I haven't really been around Hat—my own mother—a hell of a lot. But stupid." He stopped and shook his head. "Well, hell, I know that sort of thing goes on. All the time. But Jesus!" He took another drink, shook his head again, said almost emotionlessly. "But it's that it's

Hattie and Bill Gregory—that sonovabitch. I don't know what to do." Keith gazed at him pleadingly across the room.

"Do you have to do something?" he said.

Keith raised his glass and rubbed the rim against the tip of his nose, grimacing. Mary-Lynn was looking around again, as though she found the conversation dull. Undoubtedly she had heard all this already.

"Bill Gregory's the point?" he said to Keith.

"Well, yeah! Well, I don't know how I'd feel if it was somebody else. It doesn't matter how I feel though. It's—what do I *do*? I mean, Bill Gregory's, he's the kind of a guy—"

"I don't see why you're making such a fuss about Bill Gregory," Mary-Lynn broke in. "I don't see why he's so—" She stopped as Keith swung around toward her. He couldn't see Keith's face, but it would be stricken and betrayed.

"Well, I don't," Mary-Lynn went on defiantly. "I mean, I don't know whether I like him or not, I just met him once, but he's certainly successful and he's got—well, I told you I don't know anything about him, but maybe he couldn't divorce his wife and marry your mother, or maybe she didn't want to marry him because of her shops, or—"

"Because of me," Keith said. He watched Keith smear his hand over his darkly burning face.

"You said you didn't know what to do," he said. "What do you feel you should do? Punish her because of the way you've been made to feel? What is it that you feel? That's she's double-crossed you?"

"Well, yeah! No. Well, I know I shouldn't feel that. But—"

"How would you have felt if it had been your father and a woman?"

"I don't know. That's different."

"Do you feel jealousy?"

"I don't know," Keith said sullenly. He had detached his hand from Mary-Lynn's.

"I should think it would be natural enough for you to feel jealous. And maybe ashamed to find out that, after all, your idealized parent is human. Like Noah and his sons."

"I don't know what you mean about Noah. You mean when he got drunk."

He nodded, watching Keith steadily. "Well, think about this," he said. "Do you feel jealous of Bill Gregory for some special reason, or just of the man who was—was," he said again, "your mother's lover?"

Keith looked back at him; he saw that Keith was making the effort. "Jesus, Dick, I don't know!" Keith burst out. "I don't know anything about that psychoanalysis stuff, I've never taken any psych courses. It's hard as hell to figure things like that out about yourself."

"It's just an Oedipus complex," the girl said a little smugly.

He could see on Keith's face the traces of the penultimate application of lipstick to that red mouth, and he could understand Keith's need to hold that small brown hand. At least she could kiss him and embrace him and hold his hand, give him that much help in his trouble, while all he, Richard Bannerman, from whom help was being sought too, could do was talk, and not even to the point.

He noticed that Mary-Lynn's glass was empty. "Would you like to make yourself another drink, Mary-Lynn?" he said. "You'll find everything on the drainboard in the kitchen."

She moved gracefully, with the paradoxical mixture of self-confidence and the complete lack of it he had noticed before. Her dark hair was freshly combed and shone in the light; on her bare arm was a silver bracelet from which charms hung and tinkled. He felt himself frowning as his eyes followed her out to the kitchen. He had typed her at first, without even thinking about it, as being merely young and naïve; as not particularly bright, and maybe she wasn't; as pseudo-sophisticated, which was a bad simplification. For she was no ordinary eighteen or nineteen-year-old. There was an intensity about her, and that constant collision of uncertainty and confidence; it was almost audible, like the hum of a motor.

"Listen, Dick, let me tell you," Keith said in a low voice, talking fast. "I remember at a party a long time ago I saw Hattie kiss him and he patted her on the—well, on the tail.

Well, I hated his guts then, but I felt that was just—you know. But I've thought about it and it's more than just that. He used to come up with Hattie to LA, to the school where I was, and I guess afterwards they'd—" He said quickly, "Well, I remember he'd big-shot it around for Hattie and me. She'd be impressed too. You know Hattie pretty well. You know that mostly she doesn't get impressed. But in a way, I guess, he was a lot of fun—funny—and I guess he's real smart and very big-time when he wants to be and makes a hell of a lot of money. But he was always real cheap-looking and big-mouth, and he'd make me mad. Like he was always talking about how he beat people on deals and beat on his income tax. I think that crap's real bird, don't you? And he was always saying how the damn Jews were taking over Southern California and how lousy they were, and then he'd brag about doing the same kind of things he said they were so stinking and kike for doing. Well, and he'd make a hell of squawk when his steak wasn't done just right. Bloody—you know. Or when somebody bumped into him and Hattie on the dance floor. And when he drove, like nobody but him had a right to be there. Cutting in front of people. Yeah, but if somebody happened to cut in front of him, he'd pull up beside them and really chew them out. All that kind of thing. Like all the time he had to be beating everybody or showing somebody everybody. You know?"

"Yes, I know."

"He gave Hattie my car," Keith said and looked down. Hattie didn't ever tell me that."

"The whole thing would be something pretty hard to tell your son, wouldn't it?"

"I guess so," Keith said in a muffled voice.

The girl returned, and Keith held out his glass. "Would you make me another one, Mary-Lynn, please?" Keith's eyes followed her possessively. "Goddam him," he said, and his voice sounded wrenched and hopeless. "See," he said, "he lent her a whole lot of money for the shops, a hell of a lot. And my car, and I don't know what else. It's pretty awful. It's like—it's almost like—"

"Isn't that splitting hairs?" he said. "Maybe the only problem is that they didn't go through the conventional routine of marriage. A man gives his wife money. A man gives his wife a car."

"No, that's splitting hairs," Keith said.

Mary-Lynn came back, silent and disapproving, and Keith took the glass she held out to him.

"It's just—" Keith said. "How could she stand him?"

The girl sat down again, her eyes darting from one to the other of them.

"Listen!" he said, leaning toward Keith and Mary-Lynn, knowing he could not communicate with these children, that he probably would not put into words what he believed. "Listen, Keith," he said. "You were trying to tell me about Bill Gregory. Now let me try to tell you. He's a dangerous man, and a tragic man. He was born too late, or too early. A hundred years ago he would have been able to run a railroad across the country, build a city, conquer a territory. He's a possible world shaker, but the world doesn't shake as it used to. Other people mean little to him; he's not crippled by morals or sentiment or anything; he is nothing but a tremendous drive. He's a man alone, but this is not the day of the man alone. He doesn't co-operate, and this is the age of teamwork. He hasn't even found a direction for his drive. He doesn't make anything, he doesn't do anything productive—I mean, productive of anything but money. He deals in used cars. Where can he go? He can only make more money, buy a bigger, newer Cadillac, a bigger, fancier house, a bigger, more impressive swimming pool, more used cars, control of more unproductive companies and more unproductive men.

"His kind has always been dangerous, even when they were useful," he said, "even when they were building this country as no one else ever could have. But he's no longer useful. He ought to be extinct, like the sabre-toothed tiger, or kept in a deep freeze until it's time for us to conquer and exploit the stars. And he's especially dangerous now because he understands no one, least of all himself. And our salvation lies in



understanding one another, person by person, nationality by nationality, each race and colour and religion; and if we fail in that we are doomed. But he has no understanding, no sympathy for anyone else. He's the self-made man and the terrible flaw in the self-made man has always been his impatience toward others. With his drive toward whatever it is he is driven toward, he can zoom past us like a speedboat past a rowboat, and because we can't go as fast we are suspect."

He took a long breath, then said, speaking more slowly.

"You're stricken because your mother loved him once. How lucky you are, when so many love him still." He drained the liquor in his glass, holding it in his dry mouth for a long time before he swallowed it.

Keith was looking at him blank-faced. Bitterly he said to Keith, "I'm a great talker, am I not? You have the advantage on me. It might occur to you to swat Bill Gregory one in the choppers, and you could probably do it. My capacity for action is much too sicklied o'er."

He saw Mary-Lynn wet her lips. She had been watching him with a look of keen attention. "Why should he hit Bill Gregory?" she said.

"In the hopes of killing him: of course."

She did not look startled. "Oh, that's crazy."

"Crazy," he said and nodded to her.

"I guess I don't get it," Keith said.

He nodded again, but he was gazing back at the girl now and he understood his antipathy for her more fully. There she was, a natural defender of Bill Gregory. It had already occurred to him that Hattie must have looked something like her when young—but Mary-Lynn would never have the likeable human quality Keith's mother had. She must be very close to the pure and unadulterated specimen—at eighteen or nineteen already so far along the track, already the sworn and dedicated searcher after that particular Holy Grail which was both an object of spiritual worship and a large and heavy loving cup made of gold, and gold worth thirty-five dollars an ounce. He watched her lighting a cigarette; she gazed back

at him through the smoke.

"Pardon me," he said and took his glass back to the kitchen. He felt as though he were a quarterback running to the side-lines for instructions from the coach. But there wasn't any coach. He could hear Mary-Lynn and Keith arguing in low voices.

Keith came out with their two glasses. "Could we have another drink, Dick?"

"Of course," he said. "Sorry."

When they had returned to the living-room Mary-Lynn said, "Are you a leftist, Mr. Bannerman?"

"Not particularly," he said to the inevitable attack. "I'm a registered Democrat, and you may check it with the registrar of voters if you like. What do my politics have to do with it?"

Mary-Lynn shrugged carelessly.

"I'm talking to Keith about his mother and Bill Gregory. I want to point out to him that I think as highly of his mother as of anyone I know. Nor do I know anyone who doesn't think highly of her. Despite Bill Gregory."

"I think she's wonderful," Mary-Lynn said and obviously meant it.

He nodded to her even though she meant it for all the wrong reasons. Keith was slouched back on the couch, sulking, drinking his drink; he looked drunk and sleepy. "I feel he should forgive his mother Bill Gregory," he went on, "and try to understand Bill Gregory, not merely to hate him. Do you agree, Mary-Lynn?"

"Oh yes." She turned toward Keith. "I do, Keith."

"I'm drunk," Keith muttered. He scrubbed his fingers through his crew-cut hair. "Easy for you to talk," he said. "She's not your mother. You—"

"Keith," he said sharply. "What will you do, try to hurt her more than she's hurt you, when she never intended to hurt you? Is that right? Listen! Her lover you find faulty—"

"Faulty!" Keith said with enormous sarcasm.

"Faulty, and yet you intend to act as he would. He wouldn't forgive—oh no. But you'd better. Even if it's simply because

you're a Christian. Are you a Christian? And if you find her lover so faulty, you'd better try to understand. Raise an attack against that ideal if it offends you. Keep that ideal from being passed on to the next generation—that of your children," he said and looked at Mary-Lynn, who stared back at him with irritation.

"Oh, for Chrissake!" Keith muttered and dropped his face into his hands.

The girl put her arm around Keith, and there was some kind of concern, some kind of real affection, in her eyes as she said, "But you should forgive her, Keith. He's right about that, Keith. I told you that."

He watched Keith lean against her, and a dull rage swept over him because he could not make himself understood. Mary-Lynn would win. She had more marbles for this game.

"Wake up!" he cried suddenly. "You'd better start understanding before the world blows up in your faces. And you might as well start at home. You'd better wake up!"

Keith sat up straight and looked at him, blinking. "What?" he said.

He kept blinking his eyes; he was having a hard time staying awake. "Guess I'd better go home," he said grimly. "Got to go home and tell her."

"Don't go home to tell her. Make him another drink, Mary-Lynn."

"I don't think he ought to drink any more."

"Make him another drink," he said and winked at her.

She picked up Keith's glass and took it out to the kitchen.

"Stay here tonight," he said to Keith. "I'll run your girl home. Stay here and we'll talk about it some more."

"Got a dirty joke to tell Hattie," Keith said and waggled his head exaggeratedly from side to side. Then he said, "Hey, Dick, Mary-Lynn and I are going over to Yuma and get married." He flushed.

He stared at Keith, wondering if he meant it.

Mary-Lynn returned with Keith's drink and seated herself again.

"I'll just drink this one and then we'd better go," Keith said, stretching his eyes wide open.

"Let me tell you how it works," he, Dick, said. "How the different degrees of it work." He looked at the two of them and felt like Scheherazade—get them drunk and confused with talk and maybe nothing would happen; the crisis, put off, might wither away. The girl was watching him with her bright dark eyes. Keith leaned against her shoulder, his long legs stretched out, his half-shut eyes glinting in the light.

"Let me tell you about my father dying," he went on. "My father was a good man, but he was caught in it too. In a different way. Mary-Lynn, I think you would have considered him successful. He carried a huge amount of life insurance, he had two cars—always a Cadillac for my mother—he had a big house in Beverly Hills, he put my brother and myself through eastern colleges and my sister through an expensive girl's school, and he gave her a wedding that must have cost five thousand dollars. He worked hard all his life for the things you're supposed to have if you're successful.

"Then three years ago he began to disintegrate like the wonderful one-horse shay—from arterio sclerosis, high blood pressure, a liver ailment. He had two strokes in rapid succession. He was consigned permanently to a hospital. It was discovered that he had cancer.

"He was dying," he went on, and wondered how he could tell about it so coldly now. "We all were there when he died in the very expensive hospital room my mother had insisted upon. They were feeding him intravenously and draining him. We stood there watching him die, surrounded by a forest of bottles on racks, and tubes were going into his nose and into his arm and a glass tube was coming out of his side like the spear that killed Christ. He couldn't talk—he hadn't been able to talk since his last stroke. All he could do was look at us, look at us all in turn—my brother, who is a rising young lawyer in New York and who was terribly worried about getting back in time for some case he'd been working on; my

sister and her husband, whom he'd never liked; my mother crying in her mink coat. They'd grown apart twenty years before. At me—in a way I'd been his favorite, and now I was an awful disappointment to him. He lay there dying and looking from one to the other of us, and he must have known that in his life of hard work he'd never done anything worth while, that he had nothing except *things* to show for his life, that we, the people he had loved and worked so hard for, were a pretty sad lot. He hadn't really understood any of us, and none of us had ever tried to understand him. The love that existed between us was only a ritualistic thing, bought somehow, and not real or meaning anything, like all the other *things* now. Afterwards my brother said to me how disappointed he was in Dad because he hadn't died well—he had obviously been so terrified of dying. I almost hit him. Then I just felt sorry for him, because he would die that way too."

He had put Keith to sleep; he stopped talking. There was nothing more to say anyway.

"I've never seen anyone die," Mary-Lynn said in a low voice. "It sounds awful."

"You will. Yes, it's awful."

"Keith," she said, but Keith did not stir. "He's passed out," she said.

"Lulled to sleep," he said and stretched. "You and Keith aren't actually going to elope, are you?"

"Oh, of course not," she said. She made a face.

"Because he'd just be doing it for revenge."

"It's not all that," Mary-Lynn said defensively. "He asked me before any of this happened, if you want to know. I just don't want to get married right now."

"Well, I expect he's a promising young man. He'll do well. And his mother makes a good supply of the stuff that counts, the tickets to salvation."

He had thought it might make her angry. She only gave him a cool look, sitting there placidly on the couch. Keith's head had slipped down and rested on her lap; his mouth was slightly open and he was snoring.

**"Don't be silly," Mary-Lynn said. "People don't marry for money, they marry because they're in love."**

He nodded agreeably. Yes, but money is God and God is love, so money is love, he said to himself and went out to make himself another drink. In the kitchen he began to think of Betty, his ex-wife. Setting himself up tonight as some kind of oracle chanting Love and Understanding so that Peace and Joy should reign on earth, when the amount of understanding he had given Betty could have been poured into a Dixie cup without spilling, and the thought that she had been worth no more than that was a miserable rationalization. And for Bea Gregory: the junior-sized Dixie, half filled with cheap and shallow sympathy. "Here's to you, Richard Bannerman, the St. Francis of Mardios," he said aloud, raised his glass ceremoniously, drank deep, and returned to the living room. Mary-Lynn's glass was empty, so he made her a refill. He wondered at her capacity. She had drunk as much as Keith and was cold sober. He poured a stiff slug of Old Understanding into her glass, diluted it only slightly with tap water and took it to her.

She was looking at the pictures on the walls. "I don't like Rouault," she said, nodding at the tortured Christ.

**"No. Nor the Guernica, I expect."**

"There are other Picassos I like better. The pink and blue periods I like better." She seemed completely sure of herself, who at first had been so unsure. It must be because she had recognized his ineffectualness. He could think of nothing to say to her, and they sat in silence. He was just going to ask if he shouldn't take her home when Keith stirred and sat up, very white. He helped Keith to the bathroom, where Keith was sick.

**"You'd better stay here tonight, Keith. Let Mary-Lynn take your car home."**

"No," Keith said. His long face was drawn but sober. He brought his watch up close to his eyes. "Ten to twelve—Jesus! No, I got to go home. I got to get this over with." He staggered a little as he returned to the living room. Mary-Lynn

was standing, holding her purse, looking out the window. "Let's go, Mary-Lynn," Keith said.

Helplessly he watched the two of them go outside into the darkness. In Keith's car they sat very close together. The lights sprang on and swung away in a long sweeping curve as Keith backed up; with a roar of exhaust pipes the convertible started up the hill. The tail lights winked out.

He went to the phone and called Hattie Rankin.

The receiver was picked up on the first ring. "Hello?"

"It's Dick Bannerman. He's on his way home, Hattie. He's been here most of the evening."

"Thank God! I've had him in ten horrible wrecks on the highway and joining the Marines. I haven't seen him all day. I've been phoning all over, I've got the Bogans worried sick about that girl, and—"

"Hattie."

She stopped abruptly.

"He's pretty upset."

"Is he?"

"He said he was going home to tell you off. He's been a little drunk. Maybe he's sobered up though."

"Of course he got drunk. What else could he do?"

"Mostly he was upset because it was Bill Gregory. A big point is that Bill Gregory gave you his convertible."

She was silent for a long time. Then she said, "Bill must have told him that. I wonder why. Another of the things I didn't get around to telling him myself, Dick, is he mad or hurt?"

"Mad so he won't seem hurt. Pretty bitter."

"Oh God," Hattie said.

"There's something else too. That niece of Douglas Bogan's was with him, and there was talk of eloping, as though they had talked of it before. I couldn't tell if they meant it or not. I should think she'd be much too sensible. She seems terrifyingly sensible."

"Oh God! Dick, have you got any good ideas?"

"None. I'm sorry, Hattie."

"I could jump off the end of the pier, I suppose." Her voice became crisp once more. "Well, I guess I'd better go sit beside the lamp that's in the window for my wandering boy. Thank's for calling, Dick." She hung up.

He stood looking around his living room, at the wall of books, the rack of record albums, the card table with the clutter of his accounts, bills, and statements spread over it. On the end table beside the couch was Mary-Lynn's glass, a quarter full, with red half-moons of lipstick imprinted around the rim. On the floor in front of the couch was Keith's glass, almost full. He took the two glasses to the kitchen, tossed the liquor they contained into the sink, rinsed them out. Then he went out on the porch and sat down in the canvas deck chair and looked up at the huge white smear of the milky way spread across the midnight sky.

## Saturday 6

MARY-LYNN didn't know what time it was when Keith let her off at her Uncle Douglas's house, but she knew it was very late. The lights were on. Someone was still up. She ran up the walk to the front porch. In the dim orange circle below the porchlight she quickly combed her hair, put on lipstick, checked to see if all the buttons down the front of her dress were fastened. Behind her she heard the sound of Keith's car going away down the hill.

Before she could let herself in Jeanne opened the door. Jeanne had on pyjama pants and her blue plaid shirt with the shirtails out. Her hair was done up in skinny pigtails. "Where've you *been*?" she whispered.

She slipped inside. "What's the matter?"



"Keith's mother's been phoning to find out where he is," Jeanne whispered. "Daddy and Mother are in a terrible uproar. They were going to call the *police*, and they were going to call your *mother*, and—"

"Mary-Lynn!"

She jerked around. Uncle Douglas, in his foulard robe, stood in the archway to the living room. "Is Keith Rankin out there?"

"He just left." She licked her lips, looking from Uncle Douglas's red round furious face to Jeanne's frightened pale one. They were going to send her home now—that was all she could think. Jeanne squeezed her hand, but she snatched it away and, holding herself very straight, walked past Uncle Douglas and into the living room. Aunt Grace and Cora were there, Cora sitting beside her mother on the sofa, her fat legs hugged against her chest. Aunt Grace had been crying. The sight of her aunt's reddened eyes made her feel better.

"Hello, dear," Aunt Grace said. "We've been terribly worried. Cora, I want you to go to bed now. It's terribly late."

"I don't want to," Cora said.

"Now you just scat off to bed, young lady!" Uncle Douglas said.

"Well, I don't see why I can't stay up if Jeanne can! I mean, if Mary-Lynn's going home I won't even—"

Uncle Douglas snapped his fingers with a sound like a fire-cracker, and Cora scrambled off the couch.

Staring back at Cora, she fought to keep anything from showing in her face. Well, let them send her home. Damn them, damn them! She hated them all. She wouldn't cry. She saw Cora's eyes widen, Cora's mouth open into an O.

Cora was staring at her dress, and then Jeanne was, and Aunt Grace, and then Uncle Douglas. She was almost afraid to look down. But it was buttoned, it wasn't even very wrinkled. Then she saw the hole in the bodice where Keith's pin had been fastened, and the white bra showing through. Keith's pin gone, tearing with it a little triangle of cloth from her best dress, the dress she had made her mother buy her at

*Marston's before she had come to Mardios Beach. Suddenly she began to cry.*

"You're going home tomorrow," Uncle Douglas said in a choked voice. "Grace, you're to call that sister of yours right now and tell her Mary-Lynn's coming home tomorrow!"

"Oh, go to bed, Cora!" Jeanne said.

"Close the door, dear," Aunt Grace said and daubed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

Cora slammed the door.

"Where have you been?" Uncle Douglas demanded. He moved his shoulders angrily in the magenta robe. "Did you hear me? Do you know that Mrs. Rankin is just about frantic?"

She only shook her head. She didn't trust herself to speak yet.

"She hasn't seen Keith since last night, dear," Aunt Grace said. Aunt Grace might be on her side; she snatched at that. "She didn't know where he was and we didn't know where you were. We—"

"Will you let me handle this?" Uncle Douglas said

She was sobbing now, and it was easy to let the sobs become stronger, harsh and racking in her chest. She pressed her hand against her chest, over the torn place in her dress. "Oh!" she cried. "It's just been awful!" She stared down at her hand. The dress could never be mended, the pin was lost, they were going to send her home. But maybe Aunt Grace was on her side. "We've been at that awful Mr. Bannerman's," she said to Aunt Grace.

"Bannerman!" Uncle Douglas said.

"Isn't he the man who's been building those terrible cheap houses?" Aunt Grace asked. "The ones Colonel Kinney's so furious about? What were you and Keith doing there, Mary-Lynn?"

"Keith wanted to go—" She stopped, trying to think. She glanced at Jeanne, whose pale, sunburn-blotched face was twisted into a grimace of anxiety. "No, I—I guess he'd asked Keith to come over," she said. "Oh, it was just—"

"What's the matter?" Uncle Douglas said. "What happened?"

"Oh, Keith got so drunk I didn't know what to do."

"Oh, dear," Aunt Grace said in a low voice. "Like mother like son. But he is such a likeable boy."

"You were over there drinking liquor?" Uncle Douglas said.

"I didn't have very much. But I had to. He just *made* me take *some*, and—"

"That Rankin brat *forced* you to—"

"No, No. Mr. Bannerman—"

"You mean this Bannerman got you kids over there .and fed you liquor?" Uncle Douglas said through his teeth.

She nodded, looking from face to face. The questions were coming too fast, and she didn't have time to think or plan anything. Why had she let Keith talk her into getting a pint of bourbon from the liquor store for him? She'd had to put it on Uncle Douglas's account because she'd said it was for Uncle Douglas. But Keith hadn't talked her into it, she had offered to do it, showing off; how could she have been so *stupid*? She began to cry again, and she backed up and sat down on the hard curved plywood seat of the Eames chair, covered her face with her hands, and tried to think. "My best dress!" she wailed. No one spoke. "Yes," she said. "He did. Well—and Keith passed out. That's why I couldn't get home. Keith passed out and—" She stopped, feeling a hand on her shoulder.

She looked up to see Jeanne beside her. "Aw, Mary," Jeanne said huskily. "Gee! You poor—"

"I could hardly manage Keith," she said to Jeanne. Then she looked pleadingly at Aunt Grace again. "Oh, Aunt Grace, it was so awful!"

"*Dear!* He *didn't*—"

"Good God!" Uncle Douglas burst out. "What the devil are we going to say to your sister, Grace?"

A surge of laughter caught at her throat, but she thought of the pint of bourbon and sobbed again. But it was going to be all right, she knew it was going to be all right, they were so *dumb*. The triumph and content she felt were very nearly revenge. "I mean I could hardly get him into the car," she said. "He's so heavy. And I tore my dress!" she cried, looking down

at it. "My new dress, and Mother's going to be furious. But how could I help it? My best dress!"

"Oh, you poor darling," Aunt Grace said. Aunt Grace rose and came over and put her arms around her. She sobbed into Aunt Grace's shoulder, and Aunt Grace stroked her hair. "There, dear, I'll get you a new dress, an even nicer one. We know it wasn't your fault. Jeanne, you run out and get Mary-Lynn a glass of milk. Douglas, this child must be exhausted."

"It's against the law to serve liquor to kids under twenty-one," Uncle Douglas said.

Aunt Grace stroked her hair.

"Contributing to the delinquency of a minor," Uncle Douglas said. "That's what it is. Something like that."

"I think it's just terrible," Aunt Grace said. "Poor darling," Aunt Grace said, patting her back. "It's all right, dear."

Aunt Grace stood up. Jeanne had come back with a glass of milk. She thanked Jeanne and sat there sipping the milk.

"You'd better go to bed now, dear," Aunt Grace said.

Out of the corners of her eyes she could see Aunt Grace's smooth white hands clasped together, on her ring finger the diamond that must have cost two or three thousand dollars.

"Don't you worry about your dress," Aunt Grace said.

"I want to talk to you some more about this fellow Banner-man in the morning," Uncle Douglas said. "Forcing liquor down a couple of kids. I don't know what that cheap fellow thinks he's doing in this town anyway—devaluing everybody's property. Colonel—"

"In the morning, Douglas," Aunt Grace said. "Jeanne, you're not to keep Mary-Lynn awake talking."

"I'd better phone Mrs. Rankin in the morning," Uncle Douglas said grimly. "I want to talk to Keith too. We'll see about this Bannerman!"

She rose. Jeanne put her arm around her and she put her arm around Jeanne. She gave Aunt Grace a little smile as she passed her. In the hall doorway she disengaged herself from Jeanne's arm and turned. "I'm awfully sorry I've been so much trouble, Aunt Grace and Uncle Douglas."

"You aren't ever any trouble, dear. And we all love you very much."

"It certainly wasn't your fault, Mary-Lynn," Uncle Douglas said, but he still sounded cross. "Good night."

She didn't speak to Jeanne, going down the hall. If only she hadn't got that pint of bourbon on Uncle Douglas's charge account. But Keith had wanted to get some liquor and go up on the crest and talk, and she had said she would get the liquor because she had thought that would be perfect, they would go up on the crest and make out and Keith would get drunk and they would get everything settled and sure in case she wanted it that way. Instead Keith had said he had to talk to Mr. Bannerman. But he had told Mr. Bannerman they were going to elope, and he had talked about it again the second time they had gone up on the crest, after they had left Mr. Bannerman's. It had been worth it, she told herself. And Uncle Douglas would never find out about the pint of liquor.

She went into the bathroom and locked the door behind her. In the mirror her face was white, her lips a little swollen. She had eaten her lipstick off. She managed to smile at her reflection in the mirror. She was still holding the glass of milk, and it had tasted good, but she poured what was left in the toilet and flushed it down. In the bedroom Jeanne was already in bed. She turned off the light and fell into her own bed.

"Tell me about it, Mary!" Jeanne whispered. "Tell me what happened, will you?"

"I'm dead," she said. "Tell you tomorrow." She pulled the covers over her head and buried her face in the pillow. Her eyes would not close, and she stared into whitish darkness that was like a tunnel of immense length, and she felt herself sucked into it, whirling into it in a cool rush of speed, farther and farther, and faster now, but no glimmer of the end or what was at the end. She felt her eyelids close, but still the sensation of speed persisted. It was strangely almost soothing. She went to sleep thinking about the new dress Aunt Grace was going to buy her, wondering if she might be able to get it at one of Keith's mother's shops.

## Saturday 7

BEA GREGORY was watching an old movie on television. The figures on the screen were murky and moved through a continuity of violent actions in semidarkness; the voices were blurred, the dialogue sounded stilted. She sat on the floor, leaning against the foot of the contour chair, and watched, knew what she was watching meant nothing but still gazed intently at what was happening, half rapt, while back in her consciousness somewhere, like a slow record playing, she thought of all the books she should be reading, the diary she had meant to keep to list her unhappiness in some kind of order and try to perceive some meaning from the ordering of it, and all the thinking she must sometime do about herself, Bill, Billy, their lives, the future, what she had to do, what she could do. She watched the figures on the screen revolve, move back and forth, raise their hands in horror, shoot each other, stagger, fall, run, all in the depthless, detached, and distant proximity.

She was waiting for Bill to come home—waiting for Bill and watching something she didn't want to see on TV. But he might not come home at all tonight. Often he didn't, and often he didn't even call her. She knew there were other women—there was a fat blonde that a friend had told her about. It didn't matter much, but it did a little, and it was important to her that she wait up for him sometimes and, without flying at him, without even saying anything, try to shame him and to preserve the few remnants of her pride.

And if she went to bed she could not sleep.

The movie ended at midnight, and she turned off the TV and closed the blond oak doors. The lamp on top of the cabinet was the only light now, casting a funnel of brightness upward. She rose and stood looking around the room, the furniture as shadowy and proplike as the movie set she had just viewed. On

the bookshelf were several novels in their bright dustjackets and the thin set of paperbacked pamphlets for the Great Books course she had taken last year. Folded in one of them was a list of books for further reading that Richard had made out for her. She had taken the first book on the list from the library but had never read it. She thought of Richard helping her push Billy in the new car, of Richard sitting at the head of the table in the Great Books course. She had been so sure then that he had known everything, could solve anything, reason out anything—and now knew it was not so. She wondered what his wife had been like.

She went into the bedroom and turned on the light and stood looking at the two beds. Set low to the floor, rectangular and flat with their foam-rubber mattresses, they looked like two biers. Mrs. Haver had turned the covers back to show slices of sterile white sheeting. Between the beds, on a long headboard, a brass lamp with two flexible arms pointed one brass cone at her bed, the other at Bill's, and on the wall above the headboard was a framed blown-up photograph of herself and Bill sitting at the banquet table during the convention of the Southern California Association of Automobile Dealers of Los Angeles two years ago.

She turned off the light and went quickly down the hall. Outside Billy's door she stopped to listen to his breathing. In the kitchen, she drank a glass of milk and listened to Mrs. Haver's snores. Then she went outside and got into the MG. She backed out the drive past Billy's little car and drove down Ocean Avenue, dark and deserted in the faint moonlight, and across the highway with the spaced beads of headlights sweeping up the hill from the south and down the hill from the north, to slow to a stop for the red light, and on up to the crest of the hill behind Mardios, where she stopped the car and sat shivering a little and looking out over the town and the highway and the ocean. The moon hung directly above her.

Not far down the crest road another car was parked. It was a convertible with the top down, and in it she could see the occupants locked into one figure. Watching them embracing,

she thought back to when she had been as young as that, her years in college, the convertibles after the fraternity dances and, in the moonlight on the crest roads in Los Angeles, embracing dimly remembered boys who had been in love with her; the clean, exciting, only slightly sexual ritual of it had been like the stylized pure love in the movie the other night, which she could both sneer at and unashamedly cry for. Then, when the war came, the lovemaking had become violent and demanding, and, shocked, she had retired from it. Until Bill. But she would not let herself think about him now.

Finally the couple in the convertible pulled apart, the headlights sprang on, the twin beams illuminating the sagebrush. The car backed up, then hurried away with a loud roar of the exhaust.

Alone, she stared out at the ocean and felt her eyes growing wet as she thought about herself and about Billy, with the frightened, helpless worry that was at the same time a source of strength. After a long time she started on along the crest, back to Bill's house. But she drove the long way, around by California Street, slowly, and as she started down the hill she watched for the little house where Richard lived. The lights were on, the front door a rectangle of light; he was sitting in the deck chair on his porch, and she could see the glow of his pipe. She turned into his driveway and stopped behind his pickup truck. Feeling a little breathless, she got out of the MG and moved toward the porch. He rose, very broad in the darkness with his back to the lights of the house.

"Hello, Bea."

"Hello!" she said. "You're up late."

"Come in and have a drink."

She went inside, feeling very self-conscious and a little frightened. Richard had a glass in his hand.

"Not a very big one," she said as he came in behind her. He left the door open, for which she was grateful. He nodded and went out to the kitchen. He had on a white sports shirt and khaki pants, and his bare arms were muscular and brown. She stood looking around the room—she had been here once



before, when she had come to ask him to make out a reading list—at the books and the pictures on the wall, the shabby sofa, the card table in the alcove which he used as a desk. Suddenly she thought of Bill, and of what Bill would say and do if he knew she were here, and she was very frightened.

Richard came back and handed her a half-full glass in which two ice cubes tinkled. His pipe was heavy and curved. She sat down stiffly on the sofa. "That's such a wonderful old chair," she said, indicating the black chair beside the card table.

"I'm afraid I haven't been taking very good care of it. It's a Hitchcock. It used to be my father's, and I always liked it, so I sneaked it out of the house when he died. I should have it refinished."

"We had some chairs like it. Almost like it. But—"

"You and Bill?"

"Oh no, before I was married. I like old furniture so much, don't you?"

"Well, I like that chair."

She could think of nothing to say for a moment. She strained a smile. "Do you often sit out on your porch at this time of night?"

She could see the muscles along the edge of his jaw as he gripped the bit of the pipe between his teeth. His nose was red with sunburn, the rest of his face very dark. His hair was receding sharply at the temples.

"Not often," he said. "Do you often drive around by yourself at this time of night?"

"I've been up on the crest looking at the moon. It's a wonderful night."

"Wonderful," he said and inclined his head toward her.

She wished he would sit down, but he remained standing, looking down at her. She was afraid he was drunk.

"I wasn't looking at the moon," he said gloomily. "I was considering my faults, which are numerous." He took his pipe from his mouth and frowned down at the bole. She felt herself relaxing. "I was severely reminded of them tonight," he went on. "I find myself fatuous, garrulous to the point of nausea,

weak, impractical, cynical, and hypersensitive."

She was afraid that if she said something complimentary about him he would take it the wrong way.

"Very depressing," Richard said. "Confronted with a concrete problem instead of relative abstractions such as the starving Indians and the suffering in Soviet slave-labour camps, I am completely inadequate." He gave her a wry, twisted smile. "But I'm glad you happened by. I want the benefit of your point of view. Quick! Without thinking! What's a man's function in life?"

"Why, to support his family and—"

"All right. Quick! What's a woman's function?"

"To marry and have children and take care of—"

"All right," he interrupted again. He half closed his eyes and looked away. Then he looked back at her and he was grinning. "I admire your common sense," he said. "I mean it. If you have it worked out that well I expect you can cope with anything and I apologize for pit—" He stopped abruptly, looked down at his glass, took his pipe from between his teeth and put it in his pocket, and raised his glass.

"Apologize for what?" she said faintly.

"Bea, I want to tell you something. I find you a very attractive young woman and I like you. But I detest your husband."

"Don't," she whispered, and she was afraid again. He was drunk; she thought she had better leave, and suddenly she was lonelier than she had ever been.

"Why did you marry him, Bea?" Richard said. He stared at her blankly.

"Don't!" she said.

He frowned. He took his pipe from his pocket, clamped it between his teeth, and sat down beside her. "I'm sorry," he said. "That was a little brutal, wasn't it? But you came in in the middle of a conversation, you see." He touched her arm.

Her body tensed until she felt like a clenched fist. She put her hand on his and moved it from her arm. "Please," she said. "I didn't come here for you to—"

He gave her a wild look. Then his eyes softened and his

voice was warm. "I'm sorry," he said again. "No, I didn't think you did. I didn't misread your motives, but you've misread mine. Bea, don't be afraid of me. My God!"

"I'd better go," she said. "I shouldn't have— I just stopped to say hello." She was afraid she was going to cry and she felt withered with embarrassment. She was so lonely, everything was going wrong, everything scraping and clashing together like gears that wouldn't mesh. She stood up and put her untouched highball on the end table.

Richard stood up too. "Bea—"

"I really have to go. It's terribly late." She hurried out the door.

"Bea!" he said again. On the top step she turned to face him. "Listen," he said urgently, without coming after her. "What I've been trying to say—anything I can do to help—anything, ever. I'm always here if you ever need help. Because—"

He stepped out onto the porch, and she retreated. His face looked pale and earnest in the light of headlights that came sweeping up the hill. A car passed, going very fast! it looked like the same convertible she had seen on the crest. Richard didn't continue, and she didn't know what he had meant.

"That's very kind of you," she said and managed to control her voice, managed to smile. "Good night, Richard," she called and turned and hurried out to her car. As she backed out of his driveway he was standing on the porch, watching her. Driving rapidly down the hill, she gripped the wheel tightly, wondering if he were in love with her.

## Saturday 8

KEITH parked his car at the curb and got out and slammed the door. His moccasins scuffed on the concrete as he walked into

the dark garage past Hattie's Olds. A rectangle of yellow lines marked the back door. He entered and banged the door shut behind him. On the sink were a cup, a saucer, and an ashtray full of twisted cigarette butts and matchsticks. He went on through the kitchen and into the living room.

Hattie was standing there facing him, running a hand up and down her bare arm, wearing slacks, thong sandals, and a white sweater with the sleeves pushed up. She looked as though she could have been his sister.

He remembered the times she had come from New York to Galesburg when he was a kid, young and pretty and wearing clothes like the women in the magazine advertisements, and so much fun—the pride.

He moved a few steps toward her, stopped, and said loudly, "Hey, Hattie, you know how I was going to tell you if I heard any good dirty jokes? Well, I heard one."

"I know," Hattie said.

"It's about you and Bill Gregory."

"I know that joke, Keith."

"It's about—" He stopped. He couldn't say it. He supposed Dick had phoned Hattie; well, that was all right. So what? He stared down at Hattie's legs in the Balboa-blue slacks.

His voice sounded thick and unfamiliar. "Do you know what I think of you?"

"I suppose so. Go ahead and tell me though, if you want to."

"I don't want to." His head hurt, his eyes felt sandy, his throat tasted sour—a metallic, bitter sourness. He couldn't look at Hattie, and everything now seemed much less real than when he had worked it out in his own mind. Then he had been cynical and sneering. Now he was only phony, and Hattie was just standing there; this was all something somebody had told him or he had read somewhere, and he didn't know how to act when all afternoon and evening and part of the night he had been working out exactly how he would act, what he would say, what Hattie would say, and how he would reply.

"I suppose you won't believe this," Hattie said, "but it's all

over. It's been over for—"

"I don't believe it."

"Okay," Hattie whispered.

He rubbed his hand over his forehead, grimacing; his head felt like a rubber ball blown up too tight. "If only it hadn't been Bill Gregory!" he said. "Then it would have been—well, so what? That's the way things are. But Bill Gregory. Dirty, goddamn— And he gave you my car," he said. "And the money for the shops. Well, I guess I know what—"

"All right," Hattie said.

"Well, I'm not taking any more of that kind of money. I'm not going to get all crudded up with him too. I'm not going back to school on that kind of money. I'm getting out. Law school! I'm—" He looked up. Hattie just stood there, and he had been sure she would slap him, had wanted her to. The flesh around her eyes had turned dull red. "Friends!" he cried. "Well, I'll give *you* a clue! We're—"

"Keith," Hattie said, but he shook his head wildly.

"Bill Gregory! How the hell could you *stand* it? Well—well, I've got another dirty joke for you." He stopped. What the hell was he doing? Why didn't he just check out? But he had to go on. "Yeah," he said, "I've been getting—getting to Mary-Lynn plenty. All the time. What do you think of that one?"

"Have you?" Hattie said.

"No, I haven't. But we're going to get married. Pretty revolutionary, uh? I'm going to get a job and maybe we'll get married."

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Keith," Hattie said quietly.

He leaned back against the wall and looked at his mother and knew that what he was doing was horrible.

She said, "It's all right for you to get drunk and come in here and say the things you've said to me. That's all right..But don't be a fool. Don't rush right out and get married just because—"

"Because of this mistresses and lovers crap! That's why. I don't want any of that for me or Mary-Lynn. And don't you—"

"If you don't want to take money from me, let me lend it to you," Hattie said, and her voice sounded dead. "You can pay me interest. Oh God!" she whispered. "Keith, I want you to finish college. Don't put it on me for wrecking your life."

It was as though a hand had caught at his throat, choking him. He felt the cool dampness in his hot eyes, and was shamed and furious at his tears. He raised his crooked elbow and rubbed the rough wool of his sweater across his eyes. "Oh, Hattie," he said in anguish, "I think I could have taken it if it was anybody but him."

"Can't we sit down and talk it out?"

He shook his head, and in his close, burning eyes saw Hattie and Bill Gregory together, *saw them*, and knew he could never forgive her. He remembered Dick Bannerman's talk about jealousy, and knew it was jealousy, and remembered suddenly every dirty sexual filthiness he had ever heard, and each one crowded in on him now like a hammerblow on a shrinking tenderness.

"I'm getting out of here," he said and swung around. He hesitated a moment, as though there was some possible chance that Hattie could say something to undo it all. But there was no way, and she said nothing, and he ran on through the kitchen and outside into the darkness.

He got into his car. He had meant to pack his clothes and take them with him, but he had made his departure. Where could he go now? Dick Bannerman would let him sleep there. He turned the car around and started back to Dick's, sniffing violently and spitting out the window, and thinking that if he were any kind of a guy at all he would park the car in Bill Gregory's drive with the keys in the ignition and leave it there and walk. But he had to have some way of getting around, didn't he? Trying to tell Hattie he didn't want to get all crudded up with that kind of money when he already was, when even now he didn't have the guts to check out of the car as he'd checked out of Hattie's house. What the hell was he,

anyway? Adult; he wasn't adult, nor did he want to be, he told himself, driving fast in second gear up California Street.

The lights were still on at Dick's. He saw the MG parked in the drive behind the pickup truck and, wondering whose it was, slowed uncertainly. The front door was open; he saw Dick and a woman coming out. They looked like black paper cut-outs against the light. She was a small woman and the light shone on her hair, and then he recognized the MG and knew who she was and trod down hard on the accelerator and raced on up California Street.

He stopped on the crest and took deep breaths and pressed both hands against his stomach. He looked down at the car seat beside him, where Mary-Lynn had been a little while ago. But that had been clean and good. He touched the seat beside him with his hand; it was cold, slightly damp. Cuckold, he thought suddenly, and tried to laugh aloud. He remembered the plays in English Lit II where everybody was a cuckold and everybody gave each other horns and it was funny as hell. Bill Gregory was a cuckold. But he didn't want to sleep at Dick's, on that couch where Dick and Mrs. Gregory had just been beating it off, and he thought about Bill Gregory and Hattie and Hattie's bed and his own bed and the couch in Hattie's house. Everything seemed very slow and silent now in the middle of the night, a few lights burning among the trees below him, a few others down along the beach—one of them must be Hattie's—the lights of a couple of fishing boats up off Crown Bay, the tiny light on the end of the pier, the moon out and three quarters full hanging over the dark ocean, orange red, like the yolk of a rotten egg. He wondered where he was going to sleep tonight. He might as well drive down to San Diego and hunt up a stinking whorehouse and sleep there.

He drove back down to the highway and turned toward the motel at the north end of town. His wallet was locked in the glove compartment and he was sure there was at least ten bucks in it. But when he reached the motel he drove on past. He wasn't going to sleep in a motel bed where how many men and women had committed how many adulteries, how many hus-

bands and wives sneaking around, and the rubbers and the liquor and all the dirty tricks he'd heard of. He took huge breaths of the clean air that blew around and over the windshield against his face. "Jesus, God!" he said aloud. He looked up at the sky, at the red moon and the smear of stars, and wondered where God was. He thought about Zeus or whoever it was who was always coming down to earth and cranking it into all the dirty Greek bags. "Jesus, God!" he said again.

He drove far down the beach where there were no houses, parked, and got his beach blanket out of the trunk. He walked through the deep, foot-slowng sand, wrapped himself in the blanket, lay down, and, working his hips from side to side, made a hole for them. The surf was a clean milky line between the dark gray of the beach and the black of the ocean, the air smelled of salt and kelp, an occasional car passed behind him on the highway, ripping the silence.

The sand was cool beneath him, neither hard nor soft. He watched the reflection of the moon pointing at him across the water. He looked up into the terrific endless space above him. The stars seemed close. In some poem he'd read it said that the stars were the brain of heaven, but he knew there was no brain.



**SUNDAY**



# Sunday 1

WHEN Richard Bannerman came home from church at noon there was a two-tone brown Oldsmobile parked in his driveway. Hattie Rankin was lying on the chaise longue on his porch, wearing a black bathing suit and dark glasses.

"Your neighbour said you'd gone to church," she said. "So I waited. I didn't know you were a churchgoer."

"Infrequent. How is everything, Hattie?" He sat down on the edge of the chaise longue, and she crossed her legs and stretched. He couldn't see her eyes behind the dark glasses.

"Did he stay over here last night?"

"He said he slept on the beach. He hove in early this morning for breakfast. He was in an untalkative mood."

"I'm trying to keep some kind of track. I worry about his eloping with his baby doe, but she's all accounted for. Bogan called me this morning." She lay there on the chaise longue, quiet, patient, which was not like her at all. "That's really why I came up to see you," she said. "Bogan's steamed up. Says that girl told him you got her and Keith over here and forced liquor down their innocent throats. He wanted me to go in on a joint complaint with him."

He looked at her.

She put a hand up to touch her glasses. "I told him to go to hell," she said.

He grinned a little, thinking of Hattie telling Bogan to go to hell. Bogan had probably not been directed there many times.

"I guess I started it by calling up about Keith last night," she said. "So they were up and worried when Little Iodine snuck in, probably plastered and pretty shopworn, but with a nifty excuse all ready. But it looks like Bogan wants to cause trouble."

He laughed a little shakily, heard in the distance the slow

ominous tread, saw the torches in the night, the inquisition coming for him—and told himself not to be such a fool. He said, “He’s one of those whose candidate for most popular young man I’m not—Bogan, Colonel Kinney, Blackstone, and some others. They’ve been directing hostile glances my way at Chamber of Commerce meetings and cutting me on the street. They’re trying to keep Mardios safe for the three-car garage.”

“Bogan mentioned that,” Hattie said. “Corrupting our children, depreciating our property. I guess he looks on them as the same thing. That pompous squirt.”

“Well, I did give them a couple of drinks.”

“I’ll bet Keith asked for them. Well, he came home last night and read me off. Maybe he feels better now.”

“Maybe he does.”

Hattie was silent for a long time, gazing off at the trees and sky. “California,” she said at last. “It’s a funny place. It isn’t really anyone’s home, is it?”

“Mine, I think.”

“Native son?”

“And my father and one grandfather.”

“My God, you’re a curiosity. Well, you can have it. Every once in a while I want to go back to Illinois so bad I can taste it, except I’m afraid I couldn’t buck those winters any more. And the family. But that’s America, bub. Not this place.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. *This* is America. California is what America is going to be like, a sort of preview. For better or for worse.”

“For worse. Everything new and flash and cheap, neon and chrome and flimsy plastic. Soft people with suntans. I think I want America to be Galesburg, Illinois.”

He shook his head and leaned toward her. “This is the prow of the ship, and I think it’s going the right way. We’ve got one of the most advanced systems of welfarism and at the same time free enterprise operating on the most cylinders—with the advantages of both systems, which don’t seem to be incompatible. Security on the one hand, and on the other unregulated lives and a consumer’s paradise. Houses and cars

for—”

“And swimming pools and home freezers and garbage disposals and automatic washers. Every damn one of them bought on time, so when a guy loses a month’s pay the roof falls in.”

“No, it doesn’t. Because we also have the economist’s dream of a mobile working force, the rootless Californians. The roof may be blown off, I’ll grant you that.”

“Aaaaaaah!” Hattie said. “Sure the roof is going to fall in one of these years, just like it did before. And I worry about you California boys when it does. You’re used to it too easy here. You haven’t had to spend half your time bucking nature—snow and ice storms and chains on your tires and floods and summer heat. You’re a bunch of air-conditioned babies, and I don’t think you’re going to be able to cut the mustard when the time comes. Who wins the Rose Bowl games? Not you. Your America of the future doesn’t impress me one hell of a lot.”

“You live here though.”

“I know. It spoils my argument.”

“And you’ve done fairly well here. You’ve come along pretty fast in California, haven’t you?”

“I’m not too happy about it at the moment, thanks.”

He squinted at her and grinned a little. “But don’t blame California. Look, we were a nation of pioneers and frontier traders, strong and energetic because of what we had to contend with. But the countryside is all beaten into shape now and excesses are safeguarded or insured against. Now our tremendous energy has been turned toward making the economy furnish us all the things we think we want, the shiny new cars and houses with swimming pools and the gadgets. We may be wrong in what we want, but who’s to say?”

“I’ve heard you say, for one.”

He felt himself flushing, as though he’d been caught in a lie. “Yes,” he said. “But nevertheless the material wants are being fulfilled. Especially here in California. And the closer we get to that, the freer we are. And gradually we come to the big trial, when because we’re free we are faced with the choice,

when we'll see whether we have it in us to create the New Jerusalem or whether—not our needs—but our wants, are an infinite equation, and we lose sight of what should be our goal in an endless squabble among ourselves as to who is to have the most and the endless fear that the Russians or the Chinese or the Eastern Islanders are going to take our new cars away from us. Because the things we've manufactured to make life easier have subtly become more important than life itself."

Hattie was watching him with a quizzical, slightly worried frown.

"Whether we're like Bill Gregory," he said, "or—" He stopped and shrugged.

"Like you?" Hattie said quietly.

This time he flushed with anger. "No, not like me. I only talk. Too much, too often, and hypocritically."

They sat in silence for a long time. Finally Hattie said, "Well, I wish I could worry about the state of the world with you, but I have to worry about my offspring."

"Much more sensible. Have you thought about taking him by the ear and marching him home and giving him a good spanking?"

"It might have worked last year," she said and again raised her hand to touch her glasses. "Now I don't think so."

He nodded. "I wish I could do something to help, Hattie. But maybe the best thing is to let him work it out of his system and hope he doesn't do anything foolish. I'll be in a position to keep an eye on him. He wants to go to work and I can put him on—pick and shovel work. He thinks he's lost interest in college, and some blisters and a sore back might help."

"Thanks," Hattie said. "Well, let me know if you run on any reefs with Bogan." She picked up her straw bag. "And if Keith needs any money—"

"I've already lent him some. I'll take it out of his pay."

Her hands on the bag relaxed and lay brown and inert against the yellow straw. "I didn't know you were a church-goer," she said again. She got up. "What do you do, pray for errant mothers?"

He smiled at her.

"Dick, you don't think he'd really run off with that girl, do you?"

"I don't think so, Hattie."

She turned and walked out to her car, her head down, swinging the straw bag against her leg. She raised a hand to him when she had backed her Oldsmobile out of the driveway.

He went inside and took off his coat and tie, grunting as he kicked off his shoes. This about Bogan and the complaint to the sheriff or the liquor-control authorities was a new problem, and he tried to get it into perspective. If Keith knew of it, would Keith feel that Mary-Lynn had acted badly? It was a line of defence. Surely, though, Keith was too sensible to run off with Mary-Lynn; he had tried to reassure Hattie about it, but now he shook his head worriedly. There was Keith, whom he thought he knew well, but there were also Mary-Lynn, an imponderable, and how many forces at work that he could not estimate? He had had no chance to talk to Keith this morning, but he would soon. He must keep a close eye on Keith. He lay on the couch, his stocking feet crossed, trying to work it out as though it were an explosive puzzle, which, if solved, would be disarmed. He felt intense pressure on him, not just because of Keith and Mary-Lynn and Hattie, but because of Bea Gregory, and so Bill Gregory, on whom everything turned.

He had gone to church this morning to try to think it through, to look for some effective action he could take instead of continuing to shout incoherent advice and wave his arms. Sitting in the unlonely silence with the amber light streaking through the high mullioned windows, in the dimness and the coolness, he had been irritated by the minister, Father Peacock, who was young and liberal and apt to lecture the congregation on such things as racial tolerance and personal and even national unselfishness. He did not know what to make of the fact that there was no objection to Father Peacock's preachings. It was as though the congregation accepted certain liberal tenets as the way things ought to be and paid cynical lip-service to them, thus emasculating the liberalism in the same way that they had

successfully emasculated their Christianity. And Father Peacock was apt to sound his platitudes in the same manner that he, Richard Bannerman, did, so that it was too much like listening to himself.

But he had been able to shut out the sermon and concentrate on the ritual, the pomp of the flag and cross and the small choir entering, the rote prayers, the hymns he knew by heart from childhood, and, outside, the heavy background music of the highway. It was a good place to think the thoughts which, he supposed, were his own kind of prayer.

If he could only keep from happening something that he couldn't yet see entire. Stop it, or, if it occurred despite him, keep the crash as small as possible, cover the exploding grenade with his own body. Dramatizing the situation and himself, he began to feel quite exalted, which embarrassed him, and he was embarrassed further when he had to remind himself that he was reading vast symbolic meanings of danger and doom into a meaningless sequence of events. He jumped up and went out into the kitchen, where he opened a can of Spam and sliced some Jack cheese and made himself two sandwiches for lunch.

## Sunday 2

WHEN Bill Gregory got home he found Billy playing with the poker chips on the floor in front of the TV. "Hi, kid," he said, and Billy looked up and said, "Hi, Daddy," and continued stacking the chips into neat red, white, and blue stacks.

Bea and Haver were sitting over empty lunch dishes in the breakfast nook. Billy's plate, with its rim of painted cowboys, was on the table next to Bea's, the food on it messed around, a glass of milk still almost full. Haver got to her feet and smoothed the front of her white uniform.



"Can I get you something to eat, Mr. Gregory?"

"I just had breakfast." He stood looking at her until, flustered, she excused herself and left. He sat down across from Bea. "I got wound up in a meeting at the station that went late so I stayed down there with DiGarmo."

"It's all right," Bea said.

"I should have phoned."

She smiled a little. She had on a white shirt with a pleated front and an upright collar that circled her thin throat stiffly. This was one of her days for looking good, and when she looked good she made Ardath look like a bowl of mush. He watched her light a cigarette. Her hands were very small, but the fingers were long; they were good hands, and the shape of her nose and the soft pads of flesh on her cheekbones were fine. The silver streak in her hair shone in the sunlight that came through the window, like a bar of chrome. She knew damn well she was good-looking; he'd watched her in front of the mirror enough times to be aware of that. She put on the meek act sometimes, but she was as conceited as any woman he knew. She drew on her cigarette, exhaled, drew again. He was going to get the silent treatment for a while. But that was all right, he should have called to let her know he was staying in town. She had a right to be sore. He could hear the clicking of Billy's poker chips in the living room.

"Let's all go down to the beach, uh?" he said.

"All right," Bea said.

"What's the matter, hon?"

"Nothing, Bill. Why?"

"Listen," he said, and he felt a little angry himself. "I'm sorry I didn't get around to phoning. I didn't have a chance to till late."

"It's all right. I knew you must have been tied up."

"All right then. Let's go down to the beach by the pier." He watched her snub out her cigarette, then he got up and went back into the living room. "Go tell Haver to help you get your bathing suit on, kid," he said. "We're going down to the beach."

"Can I take my cccccccc-car?"

"Well, not this time. We'll go in the big Cadillac." He went into the bedroom and took off his clothes. He hesitated between his old white wool tights, which he liked, and the expensive figured cotton trunks Bea had given him for his birthday last summer. Bea didn't like the tights much. He put on the others, and a T-shirt, and stood looking at himself in the mirror. He flexed his chest muscles and his arms. He was still in good shape for forty-two. He felt a little beat from last night, but he was all right, he was fine.

When he went out Bea entered, squeezing through the door past him, and he knew she had been waiting for him to get dressed before she came into the bedroom. He swung around as she closed the door behind her, facing the closed door, his heart suddenly beating hard and sweat prickling on his face. "Frigid little bitch," he whispered. She tore him down, that was what it was; so he had to go sack in with some whore like Ardath to feel like a man again. He went outside to wait in the car.

After a long time she came out in her white bathing suit, holding Billy's hand and carrying two towels and the beach mat. Billy was carrying his red bucket. He was crying. They got into the car, and Billy sat on Bea's lap and buried his face in her shoulder.

"What the hell's the matter with him?"

"He wants to take his car. I pushed him down to the beach in it yesterday. I guess I shouldn't have."

"You'll break your back! Listen, Billy, I'd push you down there today but I'm pretty tired. Anyway that's your car and you've got to make it go yourself. You can't just wait around for somebody to push you in it. You've got to make it go yourself."

"It's awful heavy for him, Bill. He's tried."

"Then it'll just have to sit there till he can hack it," he said, started the Cad and backed out of the driveway. Billy was crying quietly into Bea's shoulder, and the persistent sound scratched along his nerves like steel wool. "Okay, that's enough crying!" he said. "I'll push you around when we get

home. Now we're all going to the beach and we'll go swimming and maybe take a hike up the beach. How's that?"

Billy's head moved a little and one eye appeared, watching him. Bea stroked the back of Billy's head and said nothing. He drove down to the main beach and parked. There were quite a few other cars in the parking area, and many people sitting on blankets on the sand or swimming out in the breakers. The lifeguard sat on his tower at the base of the pier, brown as an overcooked steak, with his straw cap and field glasses.

He walked down the boardwalk ahead of Bea and Billy, stopped at the stairs to the beach, and he and Bea each held one of Billy's hands as they descended the steps. He saw Hattie, in a black suit, sitting on a striped towel with one leg drawn up and her arms braced behind her, face up to the sun.

"Hi, Hat!" he called, and she glanced at him and nodded distantly.

Well, so what? He helped Bea spread their mat on the sand near the water's edge, and Bea lay down on it. He took off his T-shirt and sat down; he felt the warmth of the sun on his shoulders. He dug his toes in the sand. Relax, he told himself; relax, that's what he needed to do. Take it easy, loaf today, relax.

Billy was cramming sand into his bucket, his thin legs doubled up under him. His eyes were still red, his face set. Bea lay with her eyes closed, arms at her sides, one knee raised; she looked very, very good today. Gazing down at her, he wondered how much she knew about Ardath, if she knew that was where he had been last night, if that was why she hadn't come into the bedroom. But that was the way she had always been, or for a long time at any rate. She didn't seem to want to see him without any clothes on, and she never undressed in front of him. Probably it didn't mean anything; that was just the way she was, like some people put sugar in their coffee and some didn't.

He lay back on the mat, sighed, closed his eyes. But his eyes popped open and he had to raise his head again to look around.

There was always too much to see and do and think about. He saw Keith and his girl friend coming down the steps from the boardwalk, and saw Hattie watching them. Keith and the girl walked under the pier and down the beach where it was not so crowded. He felt the hot prickles of sweat on his face again. He's never liked you much, Bill, Hattie had said.

"How about going for a walk up the beach, kid?" he said to Billy and sat up.

Billy got to his feet, wiping his sandy hands on his shorts.

They walked north along the beach, on the dark hard sand along the water's edge. The dim reflections of their two figures moved ahead of them, his own very long, Billy's coming to his waist. He walked slowly so Billy could keep up.

"What've you been doing this morning?" he said to Billy.

"Ppp-playing," Billy said in a low voice.

They walked along in silence. He kept forgetting and walking faster, then slowing so Billy could catch up. He found a twisted piece of shell and gave it to Billy.

"When we get home will you ppp-push me, Ddd-daddy?" Billy said.

"Sure. We'll go coast down the hill. Okay?"

Billy's cropped head jerked up and down vigorously.

He sat down on the sand and put out an arm. Billy came over and leaned against his shoulder. "Listen, kid, how come you cry so much? You're too big a boy to cry so much."

"IIIIIIII—wwwwww—" Billy stopped.

"How come you cry so much, kid?"

"I was unhappy."

"You're too big to cry though. If everybody cried when they were unhappy, everybody in the world would be crying about three-quarters of the time, and that would be a hell of a mess, wouldn't it? You don't want to cry like that because somebody won't push you in your car."

"I'm only four," Billy said and sounded as though he was going to start bawling again. He knelt in the sand and began scooping sand up between his legs.

"Four's a big boy! You're too big to cry like that. You don't

see your Daddy and Mommy crying like that, do you?"

"Mommy cries sometimes."

He felt the prickles of sweat again. He looked at the ocean curving out and away to either side. The kelp bed was a dark long blotch in the blue water. "She's too big to cry too," he said. "That wasn't any good, kid, crying like that because we wouldn't push you down here in your car. You'll make me unhappy I bought you that car, and make your mother unhappy she pushed you yesterday. See? You've got to learn to do things for yourself. Push yourself around in your car, don't just cry because nobody else will push you. You can't cry about the way things are. What good does that do?"

Billy didn't answer.

"Look. I'll tell you something else. You've got to eat your dinner. You want to get to be big and strong, don't you?"

"I did eat my ddd—"

"No you didn't either. See, if you don't eat enough, you're weak and half-sick all the time. Remember that runny nose you had all last winter? You've got to eat your dinner or you'll get sick, and then you whine and cry all the time, and that makes Daddy mad. You see?"

Billy was silent for a long time, looking down and steadily scooping the sand toward him. His legs were covered with sand now. Finally he said, "I'll eat my dinner, Daddy."

"Good boy! Say, let's go for a swim, shall we? Come on, I'll hold your hand."

He got up, but Billy didn't move, sitting there with his head bent down. He dragged another load of sand over his legs. "Oh, I ggg-guess I won't, Dddddd-daddy." He was afraid of the water, as he was of everything else.

He stood staring down at his son for a moment, then he ran down the hard sand into the water, diving in over a wave and coming up blowing and splashing. He looked back toward the beach. Billy still sat there, half buried in the sand—like some kind of damn backwards ostrich. He's only four, Bea kept saying; won't you try to understand him, Bill? Can't you praise him sometimes as well as criticize him? You expect too much of

him. He's only four. He felt a flash of guilt and shame, an equal and opposite flash of defensiveness. He thought about his own father—dirty drunken old bum—and shook his head ; he didn't want to remember his father. He walked back up out of the water. Billy watched him come.

"That water felt good," he said to Billy.

Billy looked down.

"Well, let's go back."

Billy got up. Covered with white sand, his legs looked like jointed sticks of chalk. Billy walked along beside him, swinging his arms, then started to run. He ran awkwardly, his thin arms and legs jerking. He looked a little like a rickety old man running. He ran at a slant down toward the water—his feet splashed in the water. He stopped there and, leaning forward and looking back over his shoulder, let himself fall forward into the two-inch-deep water. He lay there with his arms out and his legs apart, his head held up and away as a wave slid in around him. When it had receded he jumped up and fled up the beach.

Billy ran to him, and he caught him under the arms and swung him around, then sat him on his hip. "Good boy!" he said. "Good boy!" Billy's little body was pressed against his, cold, sandy, and dripping. "Say, you went diving right in there, didn't you?" His voice sounded very husky. "Let's go back and tell your mother how we went swimming, uh?"

Billy nodded and stiffened a little. He let him down. "That water felt pretty ggg—"

"Feels pretty good, doesn't it?" he said. Billy trotted along beside him, and he had never felt so proud. They strode along the sand together. He slowed his steps so that Billy could keep up without running.

"I guess I won't go in any mmm-more today though."

"No, but it was a good swim though. You looked good out there." He looked ahead at the pier and the people on the sand, wondering if anybody had seen. But they didn't know, they wouldn't have understood. William Gregory, Junior ; for the first time he thought, really thought, of his name going on with

this kid, grown up, after he had kicked off—a piece of himself going on. And then Billy's kids and their kids. It was a tremendous thing, kind of the secret and prize of the world.

It was a tremendous thing! His sperm and Bea's egg and now this little kid who had gone running into the water like that when he was scared to death of it.

It was so goddam good Billy had the same name as he did. They had almost called Billy something else, because he hadn't wanted Bea to have Billy much, hadn't liked the squalling red wrinkled little thing, hadn't realized then about the name and about himself going on. But he should have known, and maybe he had, because in the end he had decided on William Gregory, Junior. Because a name was part of what you were, the tag on you, that you filled out as you went along. When he was a kid his older brothers had called him Squirt, and for a while they had called him Peanut, which he had hated and fought them for, and the kids at school had called him Red, and his mother, who had already gotten pretty softheaded when he was in his teens, would get him mixed up with his brothers and, when addressing him, would sometimes have to run through the list of four names before she got to his, as though he hadn't really had a name until he made it for himself. And then that Crazy Redhead and Wild Bill Gregory crap; he had felt he had to do that because a lot of the sharp dealers were doing it in their advertising. But he was William Gregory, he was forty-two years old, he had been born in Tustin, Orange County, California, USA. And he had made the grade; he had that on his tag now.

He had a son, who was William Gregory, Junior, and he had a wife, who had been Beatrice Stone and was now Beatrice Gregory. All part of him, part of what he was. Sometimes he would wake up in the morning thinking of all that he was, as though it were the most important thing in the world. There were Bill and Bea, but it went on and on. Sure, it was the cash in the bank and the property, but much more than that too, a much vaster statement of net worth than that. Because each person was the centre and controlling point of a whole system,

large or small, of people and things. You were the centre, but the whole system was you, as though the solar system were the sun. Because the rest of your system lived by you and because of you and depended on you, and also all the smaller systems, which depended, in turn, on each of them. Like that; and if you lost any of these satellites you were decreased by that much, or if you gained a satellite the huge, incalculable statement of net worth was increased by that much. As he was now increased by a third of all that Pacific Air comprised.

A couple of times he had almost felt like trying to set it up like a balance sheet, or a plan of organization. Except he had never been able to figure out how to do it. There were Bea and Billy. There was Ardath, but already it became complicated because of the alimony Ardath got from McIlhenny. There was the capital investment in Hattie, so part of Hattie and part of Keith. And that Ford convertible of Keith's. And the cars on the lots and the forty some salesmen and the lot managers—a hundred per cent of each of them. Then a fraction of the maybe two hundred people who worked for KFSC, almost a controlling fraction now too, so someday—damn soon too—in the station breaks it would be “KFSC, the Bill Gregory Station.” And about ninety per cent of Smitty. The crew of the service station down on Third Street and a hunk of Mike Cohn and the people who worked for him. Half of two of his brothers, whom he'd set up in a lot in Los Angeles. A third of the people who were now working for Pacific Air, and then more who would be soon. Well, and little pieces of all the people who worked for the corporations he owned stock in, and tiny pieces, even, of all the people in the country who lived off the taxes he paid, and off the people in foreign countries that got aid. He could carry it out like that a long way, and then the other way, because all those people had smaller systems depending on them, and on and on into other systems. Somewhere along the line the whole thing got ridiculous and stupid. Still, all of that, or anyway a part of it too big even to see, was him, Bill Gregory. He knew damn well it could all poop out and evaporate in the time it took to snap your fingers.



But it went on, he went on, with Billy. That was a tremendous thing.

He had been walking very rapidly, and he had to stop and wait for Billy. He took Billy's hand, and they ploughed on together through the softer sand higher on the beach. Somebody yelled, "Hi, Bill!" at him, but he didn't even look to see who it was. Bea was lying on the mat exactly as he had left her.

But he saw that Hattie was gone. It came as a jolt, because of what he had just been thinking. You don't have it for me any more, she had said.

He sat down on the mat next to Bea. "Guess what this boy did?"

Her head turned toward him slightly. She opened her eyes. Billy sat down on the other side of her and hugged his knees against his chest.

"Went in swimming," he said. "Ran right down and dived in the water. He looked like a regular water rat."

Bea smiled faintly and turned toward Billy. "Did you really, Billy?"

"Well, I got a little bit scared."

He grinned. He looked around. Leaning over the railing of the pier in trunks and a white sweat shirt, looking down at them, was Bannerman.

As he glanced away he saw that Bannerman had looked away too. He stared out at the water. A couple of kids with swim fins were riding the waves. Bea wouldn't have the guts, he told himself. What the hell was the matter with him, thinking that sort of crap? She wasn't that kind. But if she knew about Ardath— She had known about Hattie, because he had told her. She knew he'd been seeing Hattie after they were married. But she wouldn't have the guts.

He got to his feet. "I'm going for a swim. You want to come in?"

Bea was sitting up now. She smoothed her hair back. "I don't think I will just now, Bill."

"What the hell do you come to the beach for if you don't go in the water? You might as well sit out in Billy's sandbox."

Billy's frown grew deep and troubled. Bea looked at him, Bill, silently. She was chicken of the water too; she wouldn't go in if the waves were more than waist-high. And she's probably scared Billy so he was chicken about it the same way. He walked fast down to the water and ran out into the waves. When he glanced back he saw that Bea wasn't looking after him. She was gazing up at Bannerman on the pier.

She was in love with Bannerman.

He dived into the cold water and began to swim out through the surf. She wouldn't have the guts, he told himself, almost shouting it at himself, and over and over, as though to keep himself from hearing anything else. She wouldn't have the guts. What the hell was he thinking about anyway? He swam furiously out through the breaking waves.

## Sunday 3

WHEN Keith had taken Mary-Lynn home from the beach and left her off at her uncle's house there was nothing to do and nowhere to go and everything had not just slowed down, it had stopped.

He drove down to the highway and parked in front of the drugstore, thinking he would have a Coke and a hamburger. But he didn't even get out of the car. Through the big window he could see several people sitting at the counter. There was no one there he knew. Nor was there any one he wanted to see. He sat in the car and felt the late sun on his neck and forehead and felt the metal of the doorsill warm beneath his arm.

Watching the traffic on the highway and the people passing in and out of the drugstore and the liquor store, he thought about the guys in the FeeGee house at Cal. He found himself counting them over like beads on a string. And the basketball

guys, the people in his classes at Cal, the girls he knew in the sorority houses. He thought of Sara Greenlaw—well, that was nothing much, but he ought to write Sara some time, and maybe she had written him, maybe there was a letter for him from Sara at Hattie's. And there was Walt Greer; he was cheered suddenly to remember that he had promised Walt he would come up to LA and stay a week. Maybe he could go now.

But he couldn't go up to see Walt. Walt would know there was something wrong, and if he told Walt what it was Walt was just the kind of bigmouth to spread it all over the place and then everybody would know. And everybody'd seen the picture of Hattie at the house, and he'd told everybody about Hattie. He thought about everybody knowing.

He thought about his Aunt Lorraine. "Jesus," he whispered.

There was only Mary-Lynn. But he'd just taken her home from the beach and he couldn't go back up there, and Mary-Lynn had said she'd better stay home tonight with Jeanne. And there was Dick Bannerman; Dick had been down at the beach this afternoon, maybe he was home—but as he leaned forward to turn the key in the ignition he knee brushed the plastic case on the steering column that held the car registration. He leaned back again, knowing what he had to do.

Slowly he looked at the dials on the dashboard, at the chrome grating covering the radio speaker, at the red leather upholstery he had always kept in such good condition with saddle soap, at the shining maroon hood and the chrome radiator ornament. He started the car and listened to the motor run, and then drove up to the Standard station to see if they could grease it and change the oil right away.

He squatted on his heels beside the grease rack as the car slowly rose on the hydraulic hoist, staring up at the dirty, greasy underside. It had been his car for more than a year, and he had spent a lot of money fixing it up, putting on those straight pipes and Smitty mufflers and Stromberg carburation and the big chrome disks on the hubcaps, and he had worked hard keeping it tuned up and everything bright and

clean and polished and no rust anywhere. The grease pump sounded like a squashy machine gun as the guy stood stooping under the car to pound grease into the fittings. It had been a good car. Air whooshed out noisily, and the long, thick, shining column of the hoist slipped down into its receptacle in the concrete floor.

He got his wallet out of the glove compartment and paid the guy and had the battery checked for water, and the radiator, and the tires for pressure, and then drove down Ocean Avenue toward Bill Gregory's house.

He drove more and more slowly as he approached it, shifting finally into second gear. The Cadillac convertible and the MG were both there, the MG in the garage, the Cadillac behind it, and the big black toy car shoved in against the side of the porch. He could park in the drive behind the Cadillac and then walk away—but he trod down hard on the accelerator, the straight pipes whooped and roared, and he sped on past, and on past Hattie's house and back to the highway.

He drove north again on the highway, cursing himself. He turned left down California Street, left on Ocean Avenue again. He had to leave the car.

And then what? he thought. Then how did he go anywhere? How would he get up to see Mary-Lynn? Well, he walked. But how could he take Mary-Lynn out anywhere? There was no car he could borrow, except maybe Dick's pickup truck. But he wouldn't do that. Anyway, Mary-Lynn wouldn't like going out in a pickup much—he couldn't blame her for that. Well, and Mary-Lynn—you just had to have a car. You might as well be locked up if you didn't have a car. He had to have a car up at school, didn't he? He wasn't going back to school. But if he didn't have a car all he and Mary-Lynn could do was walk around—it was even too far to walk to the beach. And Mary-Lynn wouldn't—well, sure she would, she would still like him, still be in love with him, the car certainly wouldn't make any difference about that. Except that he wouldn't be able to take her out anywhere, wouldn't be able to see her, and there wouldn't be anything to do when he did.

A car was important as hell, and not just for getting around in; it was more than that even. A car was a kind of identity, and if you didn't have one you weren't anybody—to a lot of people anyway. He remembered when he'd first got the car, his last semester in high school. He'd been in that fancy Phillips School in LA then, and it was a snotty place, and he was lonely as hell and all beat down. Then Hattie had brought the car up to him and everything was different. And the same thing when he had started at Cal last fall. You judged people by the kind of car they had. This guy had a hopped-up Ford convertible so he was a pretty regular-type joe, unless he junked it up too much. That one had a Chevvie, so he was probably a pretty conservative type, probably an engineer or taking accounting. And that one with the Olds or Lincoln was loaded and trying to impress everybody. It was a way to tag somebody before you knew him: he, Keith Rankin, was the guy with the Maroon convertible Ford. If you didn't have a car nobody knew what the hell, so they didn't pay any attention to you. Not having a car was like being a real blank, like not having parents and being from some place nobody's ever heard of. You had to have a car.

But he had to give the car back to Bill Gregory, he told himself grimly as the car shimmied along, going too slow in high gear.

When he had a job he could buy another car on time payments, nothing down and so many months to pay. That was it. Some beat-up old heap. He started to drift over to the curb by Bill Gregory's house, then stepped on the gas and went past, and, still accelerating, past Hattie's house again. The tires squealed as he swung left to get up on the highway once more.

He had to do it. He *had* to. He drove north to California Street to make another pass; this time he would do it. His jaw ached from the pressure of the locked muscles. He had to do it, and walk away, and then he would be as square as he could get—but this time he didn't even slow down passing Bill Gregory's house, and he knew he could never do it, and it was the most terrible thing he had ever found out about himself.

## Sunday 4

**WHEN** Hattie got home from the beach she took a hot shower, put on slacks and a blouse, made herself a double martini, and sat on the sofa to drink it. She had been thinking about money all day, and she knew damn well she couldn't get a bank loan for anywhere near thirty-eight thousand five hundred dollars.

She looked out the window at the beach and the sun on the ocean. She glanced around the room, sipping her martini. It was a good martini, dry and crisp and cold. She made good martinis. She did everything well, didn't she? She had come home to get a pencil and paper and to figure, but she didn't need a pencil and paper. She could do it in her head.

Item One: open-end the mortgage on the house for, say, \$2500.

Item Two: Calvin Credit Jewelers, a chain looking for a location in San Diego, had offered her \$5000 for her lease and option on the downtown store, but she was sure she could get \$6000.

Item Three: A close-out sale on the downtown stock. If she sold out at cost she should get something over \$8000, although she wouldn't have to let things go at cost till the end. But call it \$8000 to be safe.

Item Four: About \$2500 in her savings and checking accounts.

Total: \$19,000. Half enough.

She let her mind rest, sipping her martini. Once she chuckled shakily. "Oh, my God," she whispered as she turned up with the thought that she should be able to get a thousand dollars out of the equity in her car. She drained her glass. In the bottom of the empty glass was a little pearl onion. She fished it out and ate it, and groaned as she considered the Coronado store.

It had been her first store. She owned the building except

for about a fifteen-hundred-dollar mortgage. But the property should be up in value since she had bought it in 1746. Probably she could refinance it for ten thousand: \$29,000. No, there would be the cost of refinancing: \$28,500.

She groaned again. Well, she had to face it. Sell the Coronado store for \$14,000—she should be able to get \$14,000 for it—have another fire sale, sell her house, from which she should be able to clear four or five thousand, sell her equity in her car, move to an apartment in La Jolla, fire Jean Fox, who was a headache anyway, and manage the La Jolla store herself. She'd never thought the La Jolla store had done as well as it should. Or let Katie Morse manage the La Jolla store and get a job as a buyer again. She had been a good buyer. She was good at everything.

She had started out to the kitchen to make herself another martini when there was a sharp rap on the front door and the door was pushed open. It was as though, because of what she had just resolved to do, Keith had come home. But it was not Keith.

Bill came in, wearing russet slacks and a large-figured sports shirt. "Hi, Hat," he said.

Suddenly she was shaking with disappointment, and with rage that he should come back sting in like this. But why shouldn't he? How many times had he come just like this? Not many here, but so often in her apartment in San Diego, and before that in her apartment in Los Angeles. And never any protest from her. Last Christmas she had been glad enough to see him. But he hadn't understood what she had meant yesterday.

"What're you doing, drinking solo?" Bill said. "Bad stuff, Hat." He grinned at her and moved past her into the kitchen. She didn't try to stop him. The figures lined themselves up in neat columns in her mind and fell apart. She heard the clink of bottles. He knew where everything was.

He came back with a highball in his hand. "You sure look good in slacks," he said. "I don't know anybody who looks as good in slacks." He sat down on the couch and took a drink.

His face looked drawn and controlled, his grin was not quite right—some kind of visible uncertainty in it that was, in him, rare.

"Keith isn't likely to show," he said. "I saw him down at the beach just now with his girl friend. Cute girl."

"Bill," she said, "didn't you understand me yesterday?"

"I had to talk to you, Hat. I've been doing some thinking." He looked down, holding his glass in both hands between his knees. She could see the small bald spot at the back of his head. He was silent for a time, then he said in an embarrassed voice, "Listen to that ocean. Say, I forgot to tell you I saw old Jimmy Dale last week. Remember him, and that big blonde? And that room we had at the hotel in Laguna with the ocean banging on the beach?"

She remembered it.

"You kept saying you were going to dive right off the balcony into that swimming pool," he said and laughed. "You kept saying it looked so damn cool. You'd have broken your neck, Hat! Remember that? And old Jimmy Dale and that big blonde—what the hell was her name?—knocking on the door and wanting us to have a drink with them. Christ, you were mad, and you yelled at them, 'Shut the hell up, will you? Bill's flying me home.' We really flew home that night, didn't we, Hat?"

She remembered the good nights, the flying-home nights, well enough. She was not ashamed of them, she told herself.

"I've got to talk to you, Hat," Bill said. "There's nobody else I can talk to much. Listen, sit down, will you?"

She shook her head. She watched the tip of his tongue come out and wet his lower lip.

"Hat, listen. I don't know what the hell's gone wrong. Bea's got to be a goddam iceberg. She—" He stopped. "Well, it's like she hates my guts. Like she just can't stand me. Well, she knew about you and maybe she knows about Ardath, but it's more than that. I—"

"Do you want to know what it is?" she said.

He glanced up at her. He looked frightened, and all at once



she was sure that he was the loneliest person she had ever known. But she couldn't feel sorry for him now.

"I'll tell you what's wrong with you," she said. "You're going through the change."

"What?" he said and scowled furiously.

"Otherwise it wouldn't bother you this way. I hurt you twice yesterday. I hurt you when I said Keith had never liked you and when I said you didn't have it for me any more. You must be going through the change."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You. You're the money-making kid. You're just about the smartest businessman I know. You're smart and successful because you're one way—all business. Buy and sell and figure it every way and always come out on top. You never used to spend your time sitting around worrying whether people liked you or not or whether your wife loved you."

He stared at her as she stopped and drew a deep breath.

"I'll tell you what's wrong with Bea," she went on. "You moneymakers are hard on women. You lent me fifty thousand bucks and gave me various items. Okay, I gave you back various others items. But I'm a business woman. It's not the same with Bea. She's married to you. She probably reads novels and magazine stories and goes to movies, where they tell her how it's supposed to be. Anyway, she picked it up somewhere that marriage is supposed to be something more than a balance sheet. Instead it's a business deal, isn't it? She's there to go to bed with you any night you want to; she keeps the house looking nice for you and brings up your kid. For that you've got an expensive house, pay the bills, give her a car and an allowance. She doesn't like to go to bed with you any more, so you set up little Ardath in an apartment for the beddy-bye part, but you're sore because it looks like you're getting a bad deal from Bea. Bea's unhappy because it's a deal at all. She didn't think it was going to be a deal. She thought it was a marriage. Well, she married the wrong man, and you made a deal with the wrong girl. These romantic types are no good for you. As you said yesterday, you should have married me five years ago."

Except that I'm afraid I might be having Bea's complaint by now."

"Goddam you, Hat," Bill said thickly.

"What did you want me to tell you?" she said. "That you had B.O. but it would be all right if you'd just start using Odorono? I'm telling you what I think the trouble is. I'm trying to give you some advice. I agree with you, your marriage to Bea is a bad deal. You ought to get out of it. Isn't that the way to do? If a deal turns out to be no good, get out of it. Now, from what I hear of your girl Ardath, that's one for you. Only this time get your cards on the table. Okay, Ardath, let's get married. This is the house we're going to live in. So many servants to do the work. This is the car you'll drive. So much a month for clothes, et cetera. Look at where you made mistakes in the old contract, you see. You might put sex on a piece-work basis. And if you want more kids—"

"Shut up!" Bill said.

She moved over and sat down in the chair across the room from him. She felt a little hysterical. He was staring at her with his mouth slightly open, and she could hear his harsh breathing. She thought of his heavily muscled hairy chest, his lean hips and thighs, and knew there was no longer any response of that kind in her. She must be getting old, she thought, and was grateful for it.

"Is that what you think of me?" Bill whispered.

"Yes," she said and stared back into his eyes. Then she looked away. "When you go through the change, first you get scared and lonely. Are you scared and lonely? Have you started to worry what your kid's going to think of you? Do you care what other people think of you? Have you started wondering what to think of yourself—not thinking much of yourself? Well, you can't afford it, Bill."

"You've got a goddam brass nerve, talking about me. You spread your legs plenty for fifty thousand bucks and a few items."

"Didn't I though?" she said, holding herself in very tightly. "But I'm going through the change, as you said yesterday, and

I admit it. But, oh, Bill, it's really going to cost me. When you see how much it's going to cost me it will scare you silly."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Bill said. He took a drink. He sat there with his head bent down, jerking it from side to side with a caged motion. Finally he said aggrievedly, "Jesus Christ, I came over here because I was worried about things, and you jump all over me."

"You said Bea couldn't stand the sight of you. I thought you might want to know why. I didn't mean to jump all over you. I was trying to tell you something."

He took another drink, grimaced, set his glass down on the floor beside his foot. He rubbed his hand over his mouth. Abruptly he said, "I love that little kid. He's a good little kid. He's all—" He stopped abruptly. She wondered if he did love Billy, really. Maybe he did. Maybe he could. Maybe he did, she thought, and felt a dart of pity for him.

"Ardath," he said, so huskily she could hardly understand him. He looked at her with bloodshot eyes. "You're not trying to say I'm like that—that—"

"I don't know her, Bill. I've just heard about her from you and some other people."

"What'd they say? Who? Smitty?"

"No, I don't think Smitty's ever said anything about her."

He glowered at her, his shoulders hunched. She saw that he was trying to get control of himself. He straightened up and his voice was level. "Hat," he said. "Bea and I are shot. We're really shot. Maybe because of what you said. But I thought maybe you and I could patch it up and I'd get a divorce and we—"

"No, Bill," she said gently. "Count me out."

"Hat, we had some pretty wonderful times before. We could make it again, Hat."

"That was before. Let's not go through anything like this. You'd better go, Bill."

"Listen, come sit over her and let's talk about it."

"No."

She thought for a moment that he was going to get up and

come over to her. She willed him not to. She only wanted him to go, she didn't want to say anything to hurt him any more, ashamed that she had said as much as she had. It was like kicking a dog that snarled and yapped and was capable of biting you painfully, but who would be hurt just the same. She was sorry for him now. Maybe that was what had happened to her; maybe she was sorry for everyone now.

But Bill didn't get up. He gazed at her steadily, pleadingly, and she didn't want to see what she saw in his face. "Hat," he whispered, "let's try flying home, Hat. Let's tell by that if we've still got it. Hat, you're worth three hundred of that damn useless Bea and Ardath put together—any woman I've ever known. You're—"

"No, Bill," she said and shook her head.

His face twisted. He said viciously, "Christ, I'm having a hell of a time getting a piece of tail in this town." He held up his glass and squinted toward the window through it. "What the hell kind of liquor is this you've got?" he said. "Remember how I used to get you Old Taylor by the case? What kind of rotgut is this?" He took a long drink, leaned over the side of the couch, and let the liquor in his mouth trickle out onto the carpet. He dropped the glass after it. She watched his hard, flat, bloodshot eyes turn toward her; she heard him curse her, watching his freckled lips move jerkily through the words. Then she looked at the stain on the carpet beside the sofa and listened to nine years turn into meaningless obscenity and a wet, ugly patch on the floor.

When he had stopped she got up and said, "All right, Bill. Now do you feel you can go?"

He got up too. "Let's go hop into bed, Hat."

"Get out of here before I call a cop."

"Call a cop!" he said and sneered at her. "You know what I can call, don't you, hon? I can call that thirty-eight thousand bucks or whatever it is and set you flat on your behind."

She began to laugh, and the laughter was hard and hurt in her chest, but at the same time it felt relaxing and almost pleasant. She stopped when she heard the sound of the back

door closing and a slap of bare feet on the kitchen floor.

Keith appeared in the kitchen doorway in his swimming trunks, and she thought, No, *No*, and wondered if she closed her eyes he might not be there. He was wearing a pitiful mask of aloofness. "I came to get my stuff, Mother," he said.

She nodded dumbly. He hadn't called her "Mother" for years. He had said it with no particular inflection, but it was the deepest and the final reproach. She watched him helplessly as he crossed the room toward the hall. He glanced at her over his shoulder just before he passed from sight.

She swung around. Bill grimaced apologetically. "Get out!" she said.

He nodded and started for the door. Then he stopped and whispered, "Listen, let me talk to him, will you? I'll tell him—"

"Just get out."

His face reddened. "What the hell does it do, poison the poor little baby even to see me? What's the matter with him? Where's he going?"

"He's moving out. Because he can't stand the sight of me. Oh, God!" she said and raised her hands to her face and closed her eyes. "Bill, please get out. *Please!*"

"Let me talk to him," Bill whispered. "I'll fix it up, Hat. I'll tell him I was just—"

"No!"

Keith came out. He carried his suitcase, his blue suit and sports coat on hangers. "Keith, wait a minute," she said. "Bill's just going."

Keith looked awkward and uncertain. He glanced at her, then at Bill. "Well, if she says for you to go, why don't you go?" he said, and he sounded very, very young. But now Bill would not go.

Keith set his suitcase down and laid his suit and coat carefully over it. He stood up, very tall. "Well, go on!" he said.

"Don't tell me when to come and go," Bill said in a low, tight voice. "I come and go when I please." He stopped. She didn't look at him. Bill said, with what sounded like an effort,

"Listen, kid, everything's going all wrong here. You've got it all wrong. I was talking to your mother about getting—"

No! she thought, but he said, "—about getting married."

"No!" she cried. He must have thought he was saying the right thing, which was completely wrong. She shook her head wildly. "Bill, *go away*. I've got to talk to Keith. Keith, for God's sake—"

"She said to go away," Keith said. "Go on then."

She turned toward Bill. The emotions on his face were like running shadows across a screen. He backed up a step, he stopped. Keith took a hesitant step toward him, fists clenched.

"Keep him away from me," Bill grated. "Big stupid jerk kid!"

Keith lunged forward, but she thrust herself in front of him. He didn't try to get past her, retreating very easily when she put her hands on his chest. His long, young face was blurred and anguished. "No, Keith," she said and pretended to be pushing him back. He was afraid of Bill.

"You sonovabitch!" Keith yelled suddenly and jerked back away from her. She saw his mouth straining. "You sonovabitch, leave my mother alone!"

Keith swung away from her, then back, and his face was terrible with shame. "Well, I know why you're coming around here!" he said hoarsely. "Your wife's shackled up with Dick Bannerman, that's why! Sneaking up to Dick Bannerman's place every night and—"

"No!" she cried. "Keith, please, no!"

Keith gritted his teeth and tried to grin and made a small sobbing sound. "Yeah!" he said. "Yeah, how do you like that? I guess she's found a better real man than you, you cheap-ass used-car dealer, you—"

She tried to catch his arm but he snatched it away. She could feel the spray from his lips as he cried, "*You cuckold!*" He raised his hands to his ears with his forefingers sticking out in a gesture she didn't understand, and he laughed shrilly. "You know what cuckold means, used-car dealer?"

"Keith, stop it!"

**"He doesn't even know what it means!"**

**"Shut up!" Bill said.**

**"Go look it up in the dictionary, used-car dealer! Go ask your wife, real man, big man—you cuckold jerk!"**

Bill looked at her with huge bright eyes, his face dark and stricken and disbelieving. He raised both fists shoulder high and slid quickly toward Keith, and she swung around to hold Bill away now. But he only whispered something sibilant between his clenched teeth, turned, and moved swiftly out the door, the door shivering open against its stop and then shivering half-way back to show a narrow empty rectangle of boardwalk, beach, and ocean.

**"Why didn't I hit him?" Keith sobbed. "Yellow," he said. "Yellow bastard." He wiped his arm fiercely over his mouth, then over his eyes. She put her hand on his arm again, but again he jerked away and stooped to pick up his suit, coat, suitcase. "Keith, if you'll just let me—"**

**"No!" he shouted. "No, don't touch me! Don't—" He stumbled out into the kitchen, the suitcase slamming against the door frame and swinging him half around so that she saw his face one last time before he ran out the back door, as Bill had just run out the front. A moment later she heard the grind of his car.**

The tires screamed as the car started away. **"Oh, please be careful,"** she heard a voice whisper. She sank down on the couch, then let herself fall over on it, her arms pinned beneath her body, her face pressed into the dust-smelling upholstery. She groaned; Bea Gregory and Dick Bannerman. She couldn't believe it. But why would it even have occurred to Keith if it weren't true? **"Oh, God!"** she whispered, crushed beneath the weight of all the pain and the continuing pain she had caused. Now Bea Gregory. What would he do to Bea?

She lay there. After a while she found herself thinking of the two hundred dollars she sent her mother each month. Each month it had to go. But if she could get six thousand for the lease and option on the downtown store, and eight for the downtown stock, and fourteen for the Coronado store

and stock, and maybe five thousand for the equity in the house, and—

## Sunday 5

BEA held her coffee cup in her lap, sitting in the curved palm of the plastic and chrome chair and listening to Mrs. Haver tell about her little nephew in Whittier. Billy was on the floor in front of the TV set. In the flickering light from the screen, his short hair glowed red in a kind of halo set down around the circumference of his head. But he wasn't watching the cowboy movie; grunting a little, his tongue protruding from the effort, he was stacking Bill's poker chips into neat piles of reds, whites, and blues. Then he would knock them over and start again. Sometimes he laughed.

"—that boy will eat anything," Mrs. Haver was saying. "They got him some chalk to draw with and Eunice caught him chewing on it. Like candy! And he tried to eat a piece of sandstone—"

"Sandstone?" she said.

"Calcium deficiency," Mrs. Haver replied. She was a stout, short, compact woman with iron-gray hair cut modishly short. "The doctor gave him some calcium tablets and there was no more of *that*. But there was never any trouble with that child eating."

She looked down at her son, stacking up the poker chips once more in that complete concentration that could only be broken by shouting in his ear. He did not eat well. She didn't know what to do about it, and the advice of three pediatricians had been of no help. Mrs. Haver said to take no notice, he would grow out of it. But Bill was apt to get mad and force



Billy to eat, and twice now Billy had thrown up immediately afterward.

On the TV cowboys were chasing other cowboys on horse-back, shooting as they rode, but the sound was turned down so that the shots were not audible. Billy paid no attention to the cowboys. His thin face was intent as he worked with the poker chips. He was a handsome child. He had the delicate, aristocratic features of her father; like her own features, but masculine. A boy who had been in love with her in college had told her she had the face of an English duchess. She had accepted the compliment as her due; often, as a girl, and even now, she studied her face in the mirror and thought of herself as a duchess or princess out of time and fallen romantically to become a kind of middle-class Cinderella, whom at last someone, like Richard, would recognize. And her son's face was that of a little duke or prince disinherited. Suddenly he knocked over the chips with a wild gesture and laughed in a deep voice—"Ho! Ho! Ho!"—like Long John Silver on his *Treasure Island* records.

"Fifteen men on a dead man's chest!" she chanted in a deep voice too.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! and a bottle of rum!" Billy said and looked up at her and smiled.

"And what did you hear in the apple barrel today, Master Jim Hawkins?"

"Oh, I'm not Jim Hawkins. I'm Long John Silver, because I've only ggg-got one leg. See?" He stretched out one leg; the other was folded under him. "A great big ccc-crocodile bit the other one right off."

He frowned and looked down at his leg. She watched the motion of his lips, reading them and feeling her own lips moving silently with them in an effort to help him get the words out. "Where's Ddd-daddy?"

"He went for a walk, darling."

"When's he coming back?"

"Pretty soon."

"Well, I wish he'd come bbb-back. I'm going down the hill

and he's ggg-going to stay at the bottom and stop the other cuh-cuh—"

"Cars," she whispered, and saw Mrs. Haver frown and shake her head.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Haver said. "I thought we'd forgotten about going down that hill for a while. Don't you want to go outside and play in your sandbox, Billy? I think boys ought to be outside playing on days like these."

"I'm waiting for Daddy," Billy said. He looked at Mrs. Haver defiantly and then began gathering up the poker chips. A car passed in the street, accelerating loudly.

She didn't know where Bill had gone. Returning from the beach, he had been very silent. He had taken a shower and changed his clothes, sat in the contour chair and watched TV and drunk a beer, then read the stock-market letters he subscribed to. He had looked at her queerly from time to time; he had snapped at Billy when Billy asked to be pushed in his car. Then he had said he was going for a walk.

She was waiting for him too. So much of her days and nights spent waiting for Bill to come home, and then waiting for Bill to leave again, her life spent waiting, not just for Bill but for something that never happened; she didn't even know what it was.

Mrs. Haver was standing. "More coffee, Mrs. Gregory?"

"No, thank you," she said. She handed her empty cup to Mrs. Haver. "I think I'll—" She didn't complete the sentence. She didn't know what she would do now. Sit and watch Billy playing with the poker chips and the cowboys shooting each other silently on the TV. To get married and have children and take care of them, she had told Richard. And, having had hers, slowly begin to die, her function gone. She had not mentioned that. Anything I can do to help, Richard had said. Rescue me, she thought with a sudden keen stab of contempt at herself. Rescue her from what, and to what? Bill had rescued her from nothingness to misery; now she wanted to be rescued back to nothingness again.

In the kitchen she heard Mrs. Haver putting the coffee cups

and saucers in the dishwasher. She stared down at her hands, folded in her lap.

"Oh, there's Dddddddd-daddy!" Billy said.

She looked up to see Bill coming past the front window, walking rapidly. She got up. He came in without stopping to close the door behind him, and when she saw his face she instinctively retreated a step. His hand swung up and exploded against the side of her head. She stumbled back with her cheek on fire, falling against the end table beside the chair, trying to keep her balance and half turning toward Billy and then snatching at the toppling lamp before it fell. The room swung around heavily, eccentrically, and came to rest.

"No!" she said as she saw Bill's face close to hers again, perfectly expressionless now. She could hear the laboured sound of his breathing, see Mrs. Haver behind him in the kitchen doorway, her spread hands covering her mouth. "Mrs. Haver!" she called almost calmly. "Take Billy out to the sandbox. Please. Billy—"

Pain slashed across her mouth and nose again, and she moaned and covered her face with her hands. She felt the strength drain out of her, she felt herself falling. She fell with a kaleidoscopic vision of colored poker chips and cowboys galloping and Billy's face clearly etched before the TV screen, his eyes rimmed with white and his mouth stretched wide in an agony of fear, and Bill standing enormously tall above her. Why? she wondered. *Why?* She heard a distant screaming and knew it must be Billy. Bill had gone insane and was going to kill her, and Billy had to be gotten out of here.

"Dirty whore!" Bill said.

She saw his leg draw back; she screamed, her side pierced with blunt, crashing pain. "No! Bill!" she whispered and struggled to her knees. "Mrs. Haver!" she called. "Take Billy—" She flinched, thinking, he would kick her again, trying to watch his legs, which were only a red-brown blur, and holding her hand out toward them.

"Get away!" Bill said hoarsely. "Let go. *Get away!*" She saw that Billy was clinging to his leg, Billy's arms and legs wrapped

around Bill's leg as though he were riding on Bill's foot, as he had done when he was younger. Bill was standing motionless, staring down at Billy, his mouth twisted horribly. "Get off!" he cried. He looked at her. "Get your brat off!"

Obediently she reached for Billy. He released Bill's leg and flung his arms around her neck, panting and gasping for breath and sobbing. She tried to rise with him but he was too heavy.

"Mrs. Haver!" she said, and at last Mrs. Haver came forward and swung Billy up away from her. He screamed and kicked his legs, his arms extended down toward her. "Dear," she said, panting, "I want you to go down to your room for a little while. I—"

Bill shouted, "Will you goddam get him *out* of here!" and Mrs. Haver fled heavily down the hall with Billy.

She gasped as she got to her feet, clutching her arm against her bruised side. She watched Bill's hand. She watched it rise again. *Why?* she thought dully, but he didn't slap her again. Instead his hand grasped her arm cruelly, his fingers digging into the flesh and twisting, jerking her off balance, thrusting her toward the door.

"Out!" he said between his teeth. "Out!" He pulled her, stumbling, toward the door. "*Whore!*" he said. "I ought to— Out!" he said. "Out of my house, you dirty sneaking bitch." He pushed her violently outside.

She tripped, tried to clutch at the frame of the porch door, fell. She didn't even try to break her fall.

She lay huddled up on the grass beside the porch, beside Billy's little car. The door shivered shut above her.

The grass was cool. She could see the distorted reflection of her face in one of the chrome hubcaps of Billy's car. Finally she summoned all her strength and pulled herself upright, moaning from the thrust of pain in her side. She had twisted her ankle, and it burned fiercely as she limped over to the MG. Her ankle burning, her legs trembling, she could hardly depress the clutch, and she rasped the gears loudly and hoped that Bill had not heard. Halfway down the drive she stopped. She could not leave Billy. Nor could she go back

into the house; she was afraid. She strained her ears to try to hear if Billy was still screaming, and heard nothing.

She backed out of the drive and slowly drove along the beach to California Street, across the highway, and up Mardian Heights to Richard's house. There was another car in his driveway, parked behind the pickup truck, but there was no place else for her to go. She parked and got out. When she reached the door she was panting with pain and exhaustion. She rang the bell.

When he opened the door she said, "Richard, I'm—" and stopped, staring not at him but straight ahead of her as she felt his eyes on her face, on the aching flesh.

"What's this?" he said harshly. "What's he done to you?" What—"

"I've got to sit down," she whispered.

He helped her inside. Keith Rankin was there, in swimming trunks and a T-shirt, rising gawkily from a chair across the room. His face looked like a long oval of crinkled white paper. She sank down on the couch and leaned against the arm.

"Bill?" Richard said in the same harsh voice. Standing over her, he looked elongated and huge, as Bill had looked after he had kicked her, and his brown face was stiff and controlled, as Bill's had been, but with a kind of fierce compassion. He put out his hand and with a gentle finger touched the corner of her mouth. He raised the finger, curled, to look at it, and she could see the spot of blood. She blotted at the corner of her mouth with her own hand, then pressed her arm against her throbbing side.

"I didn't know where else to go," she whispered.

Richard nodded. Keith stood before his chair stiffly, as though at attention.

"I don't know what I've done," she said to Richard. "He came back to the house and hit me and called me—names. And said to get out of his house. I don't know what to do about Billy. I'm afraid to go back. I—"

"It's my fault," Keith said.

She looked at him. Richard turned. She saw Keith's throat

working.

"I told him," Keith said.

She didn't understand. Richard said in a puzzled voice, "You—"

"Jesus, I'm sorry," Keith said. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Gregory."

"You told him what?" Richard said.

"About you and Mrs. Gregory," Keith said. He didn't look at Richard. He made helpless motions with his hands. "He was at Hattie's. He was—well, I told him. I had to do *something*. He was—" Suddenly he swung around toward Richard. "Oh, Jesus, Dick, look at her *face!*"

"You told him *what* about us?" Richard asked, but she saw now; it had been Keith who had driven past last night as she was leaving.

She shut her eyes for a moment. When she opened them Richard was sitting on the other end of the couch, his big body hunched forward, his hands massaging his temples. She couldn't see his face. Keith looked tortured.

"It's all right, Keith," she said. "It was all just a mistake."

"Mistake," Keith said shakily. "It was— Mistake! I was just chicken. I—"

"It wasn't your fault, Keith."

"I should have hit him!" Keith cried and slammed a fist into the palm of the other hand. "Instead I fixed it so he went home and did *that* to you. And I came here the other night and bummed drinks and got drunk and now Dick's— What a— rotten chicken! *Jesus!* Why couldn't I have *hit* him?"

"No, Keith," she said. "It was all just a mistake and you're not to blame yourself like this." Richard was watching her curiously. She saw Billy's terrified face before the television screen. Keith stood there at attention, his lips tight, his throat working. He avoided her eyes.

"You're forgiven, Keith," Richard said. "Take it gracefully."

"Jesus, I'm sorry," Keith whispered. After a long time he moved toward the door, slowly, not looking at them. "Well, I guess I'll be going," he said. "I guess I've done just about

enough to everybody."

"You don't have to go," Richard said. "Stay here. We may have a visitation from St. Francis, who will cure all our ills. • You don't need to go, Keith."

Keith just shook his head a little. He went on out.

Neither she nor Richard spoke. She hoped Keith could get out of the driveway past the MG. She listened intently to his car start, listened to it backing, moving forward, backing, moving forward; at last the sound of its motor faded away to silence. With the silence she wondered if Billy were still crying, and everything inside her twisted; she thought of Billy seeing Bill hit her, and was twisted again; and thought of Billy trying to protect her. She bent down to take off her shoe, which cut painfully into her ankle.

"We'd better soak that ankle in Epsom salts," Richard said and rose and went into the kitchen. She lay on the couch with her eyes closed and felt only pain.

Richard came back in with a dishpan and bent beside her to put her foot into the warm water. She felt his fingers touching her foot. By moving her head slightly she could see his hand, and her foot, pale, blue-veined, swollen, blurred in the water.

"You'd better stay here for a while," Richard said without looking up.

She nodded. What am I going to do? she thought with a sudden terrible urgency. "What am I going to do about Billy?" she cried. "I can't leave him there. What am I going to do? I can't—"

"You can't do anything right now. I've got some sleeping tablets. I think you'd better take one."

"All right," she said. "If you don't mind having me here."

He just shook his head. Finally he rose and picked her up and carried her into the bedroom, his face stiff and aloof, his eyes averted. He helped her off with her skirt and blouse. In her slip she got into the bed, and he covered her with the sheet and blanket and closed the venetian blind. He brought her a yellow-jacketed capsule and a glass of water. She took them gratefully. It seemed that his tiptoeing out of the room

was part of her going to sleep.

When she waked again her mind was heavy and confused. She was crying, and Richard's voice was asking her something. She tried to remember what she was crying about. Then she felt the pressure on the bed beside her and she tightened all over, painfully. She could see nothing in the darkness. She felt a hand stroke her back gently, Richard's voice gently murmuring. The hand and the voice were disembodied. Her eyes, open wide to the whitish blackness of the pillow, closed, her hands, clenched in the pillow, gradually relaxed, the hard sobbing ceased to shake her body, slowed, became almost pleasant. Her drugged mind succeeded in shutting out everything but the hand stroking her back and the quiet voice in her ear, and finally they too began to come from farther and farther away.

## Sunday 6

It was dark when Bill got to Ardath's apartment. Her door was locked. He unlocked it and entered. Lights were burning in the living room, but she wasn't there. He strode across to the bedroom and flung the door open. She was lying on the bed in a black silk job, propped up by three huge pillows. The TV was on.

"Billy!" Ardath said.

He stood in the doorway and looked at her, and at the closet door and the bathroom door, and wondered if he ought to check. She might have heard him coming in time and—to hell with it.

"Why, what's the matter, darling?" Ardath said.

He reached down and snapped off the TV.

Ardath slid off the bed and came toward him, wiggling.



"You look like—"

"Get dressed," he said. "I want you to go out and go to a show. Smitty and another guy are coming. We're going to do some business. You go on out to a show."

She pouted. "But why can't I stay and have a drink with you and Smit—"

"No." He stood there with his legs spread and his arms folded across his chest, trying to keep from trembling. He stared into her face and heard Hattie saying, "Your girl Ardath. That's the one for you," and seeing Bea at Bannerman's, Bea and Bannerman in bed, Bea no iceberg for Bannerman, Bea sneaking up to Bannerman's and putting out for Bannerman and coming home and freezing him off like he had the clap. And Billy hanging onto his leg; from time to time he would feel a kind of ghostly prickling clawing at his right leg, as though Billy were still hanging there. "Get dressed," he said. "And hurry up about it for once. I want you out of here."

He backed out and closed the door. He started for the kitchen, where the liquor was, but he didn't want a drink. He sat down in the easy chair that faced the window, stretched his legs out, let his arms hang over the sides, leaned his head back and closed his eyes. He saw it all in the darkness behind his closed lids. He got up and paced across the floor to the bedroom door, stopped, headed for the kitchen again, stopped, finally went to the window and with a terrific act of will held himself there, leaning on the sill and staring out at the lights of San Diego spread out below him, the lights flowing like a bright speckled cloth over the hills and gathered very bright as in a fold in the downtown area, stopping at the bay and beginning again around the edges of the bay. He stabbed at the glass with a rigid forefinger, pointing down toward his State Street lot on the edge of the bright fold, and stabbed at the radio station where the red aircraft warning lights surmounted the big antennas, at the high pile, perforated with lights, of the Bank of America building where his office was. Far to the left, with a two-way stream of lights pouring along it, was the highway back to Mardios.

Where the hell was Smitty?

He paced the room again until Ardath came out, dressed in her tan gaberdine suit and that hat to match that had cost—cost him—fifty bucks. The long plume nodded as she walked. She looked good when she was dressed up. She looked good in the fifty-buck hat, and her body would look good even in a steel boiler. He tried to picture her in his house in Mardios Beach, where she'd never been, and something came up and hung in his throat like a tennis ball. He thought of waking up to that face every morning. It would be like having something haunting you. Well, there were plenty of bedrooms. But she would always look like a damn whore. She looked like a damn whore even when she looked good, even dressed up in two hundred dollars' worth of clothes.

"See you later," he said to Ardath.

"I think it's pretty mean of you to come down here and kick me out of my apartment like this," Ardath said. "What's the matter, Billy?"

"I told you not to call me Billy. Nothing's the matter. Everything's just fine. Business, that's all."

"But why can't I stay and—"

"It would bore you. Beat it. See you later."

She came over and kissed him, still pouting. The plume of her hat tickled his ear, and she smelled like an explosion in a perfume factory. Bea never used perfume at all. Or maybe she did for Bannerman. Maybe she kept a big bottle of it up at Bannerman's and poured it all over herself for Bannerman.

He patted Ardath on the behind and pushed her away. She smiled back at him over her shoulder as she went out the door. Probably Hattie was right, she was the kind for him. He knew where he stood with her. He paid her rent and her bills, and she knew if she cheated on him he would jerk the rug right out from under her. He thought of McIlhenny and felt the tennis ball stick in his throat again—only it was bigger than a tennis ball, it was as though all his insides had got mashed up into a ball and shoved up into his throat, leaving him hollow and aching where his insides had been. Hattie saying those

things to him in her crisp, matter-of-fact voice, and Keith yelling at him, and Billy clinging to his leg like that, and Bea when he had hit her not even afraid, just trying to get Billy away so Billy wouldn't see him hitting her, and Bea's car parked in Bannerman's driveway when he had driven past—Bea not even trying to hide where she was from all the goddam people in Mardios! Bea and Bannerman and Bea and Bannerman and Bea and Bannerman. He slammed his fist against his leg and cursed her.

Where the hell was Smitty?

Before Smitty arrived, at nine o'clock, he, Bill, had had a drink and had looked through Ardath's bedroom to see if she had been getting any letters from McIlhenny. He hadn't wanted to look, because he was afraid he might find some, but he had to do something. She'd hidden them where he couldn't find them though, if there were any. With Smitty was the private dick, a big man in a green loafer jacket, with a pale fat face, pouched eyes, and a thick shock of greasy black hair. He carried a battered leather case with a strap, like a mailman's bag.

"Sorry I was so long," Smitty said. "I had quite a time locating Mr. Wilcox here."

"Hiyuh," Wilcox said and put out his hand.

He didn't take it. "Got your camera?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Film? Flashbulbs? If we got to break in, you got a jimmy or whatever it is you do it with? We're not going up there till midnight, and I want to make goddam sure you got everything you need before we go."

"Everything right in here, Mr. Gregory," Wilcox said and patted the leather bag. Smitty sat down on the couch with a sigh, giving little tweaks to the knees of his trousers.

"I may want you a couple of days."

"Okay with me, sir."

"You're going to handle this right now. No slip-ups."

"Never slipped up yet, Mr. Gregory."

"You'd better not slip up this time. Okay, go get yourself a cup of coffee down at the corner and come back at eleven-

thirty."

"Yes, sir," the detective said and left.

Watching him go, he felt, for the first time since he had left Hattie's, that he was calling the play. It was a good feeling. Okay, Bea.

"He's an ugly sonovabitch," he said to Smitty.

"You didn't tell me you wanted a pretty one."

"Is he supposed to be good?"

"He does this kind of work. He's had experience. You could probably do better if you went to Los Angeles."

"I haven't got time," he said and sat down facing Smitty and the big window. He felt better now. He stretched. "This is going to be fun," he said.

"Where's Ardath?" Smitty asked.

"Show," he said, and suddenly he wondered what Smitty thought about Bea's going out and shacking up on him like that. "Why don't you go make us a drink, Smitty?" he said.

Smitty got up and went out to the kitchen. He had told Smitty to go make the drinks so that Smitty would know this was business tonight, that he was working tonight. It burned Smitty, he knew. He liked to burn Smitty, the snotty bastard; he liked to show Smitty where he stood. He, Bill, had never even finished high school, and Smitty had gone to some expensive boys' school and to law school in the East and could wear a suit like that—and was damn glad to make his drinks, juggle his income tax, and jump when he said jump. Smitty had better be glad.

Smitty came back and handed him his drink and sat down on the couch with his own. Smitty looked at him with his distant, half-amused expression.

"Now, I'm going to divorce that little whore. I'm going to get her on adultery."

"So you said. There would seem to me to be easier ways."

"So you said. I want it this way."

"If she wants to make a fight there are Ardath and Hattie and several others she might know about."

"She won't make a fight. I know Bea."

"Let me tell you about all the sad men coming out of divorce courts who thought they knew their wives."

"You let me worry about Bea. She won't fight. I'm going to fix it so she can't fight. Tonight, if that fat schmuck doesn't screw up." He held up three fingers and touched the first. "One, I want it on adultery." He touched the second finger. "Two, I don't want her to get a stinking cent of mine."

"There you run up against a matter of California law regarding community property."

"I'm paying *you* to get me out of that."

Smitty shook his head and smiled faintly.

"I haven't done anything but lose money since I married that whore."

"Always able to maintain your sense of humour, aren't you, Bill?"

Something swelled in his head and pushed at the backs of his eyes. "Goddam it!" he whispered. "I haven't got a sense of humour. Goddam her. She gets nothing from me. Nothing. Goddam her, I'll—"

"What about the boy?"

He sat there staring out at the lights and felt the spectral clawing at his leg and saw in a kind of double-exposure Billy running down into the water and Billy's screaming, terrified face over Haver's shoulder as she had carried him out of the room.

"I want Billy," he said.

"You want everything."

"I'm going to get everything. She gets nothing. She gets her diddling from Bannerman—that's all she gets."

"If Wilcox gets pictures and you can pick up some affidavits from the neighbors—"

"There'll be plenty of affidavits."

"—and Bea doesn't bring in Ardath and Hattie or any other women to support a countercharge, you might get the boy. But—"

"But, hell. She doesn't get a goddam thing. I mean it, Smitty!" He wiped the back of his hand over his mouth. "You

know what?" he said. "It's hard as hell to admit you've been a stupid sonovabitch, but I was one when I married that cotton-head bitch. She sucked me for plenty, and then she sneaks around and—"

Smitty said, "Knowing Bea, I'd say that if you let her take the boy she might not demand a settlement or alimony. Maybe a little support money—"

"Nothing!" he said. He reached down and slapped at his leg and glared at Smitty, who swam pinkly before his eyes. "She doesn't get that kid!" he said hoarsely. "What kind of a mother is that? She— Anyway I want it in court." He had thought of the scene in court with Bea all the way down here from Mardios, and he wanted it very much. Smitty was watching him with the sarcastic smile.

"Some time I'm going to knock that grin right off you, Smitty," he whispered.

"You're going to have to make up your mind," Smitty said. "It's going to cost you to go to court and make Bea look bad. I think it will cost you a settlement that will jar your back teeth, *and* alimony. You won't get the boy either if Bea decides to make you look bad too. But you might be able to settle out of court by trading her the boy for—"

Smitty's voice went on, but he didn't hear. He stared out at the lights of San Diego and could not hear or think, could only feel hate.

"Bill!" Smitty said. He looked at Smitty, who was holding up three fingers. "Three things," Smitty said. "You want to splash Bea with adultery in court. You want Bea to get no money. You don't want her to have the boy. You *cannot* have all three. Now, which is the least important?"

"All right, forget about going to court."

"Maybe," Smitty said. He leaned back on the couch. "You think she won't fight. I think she may. However. What do you want most then, the boy or the property? Or let me put it the other way round. Which do you want most, Bea not having the boy or not having the property?"

He sat there and tried to think. He thought about what Hat-

tie had said to him, and he wanted to tell her she was wrong, she had it all wrong, had him wrong. He stared back into Smitty's eyes and knew that Smitty despised him. They all hated him. To hell with all of them! How could he help the way he was when every minute you had to be pushing against those who were trying to keep you from where you were trying to get, and every minute you had to be keeping a step ahead of all those who were trying to catch up with you and get past you. Goddam easy for people like Smitty with a law education so they were all set to have snotty grins and think behind their grins how you were a pretty crummy type; and easy, too, for the other stupid bastards it was too tough for, who were just floating along picking up nickels off the street, to think they were pretty swell about always being gentlemen and not stooping to anything that offended their goddam noses. Well, let them all think what they thought and go screw.

He clenched his fists and stared back at Smitty and sweated with the concentration of clearing the hate out of his head and thinking straight. Suddenly he grinned. "All right," he said. "Here it is. She'll settle. She'll settle for no money and no kid. Because I'm going to get some pictures tonight and she'll settle any way I say because if she doesn't I'll have some feelthy pictures all bound up nice for her little darling boy if she doesn't."

Smitty just looked at him silently and the smile was gone.

"I wouldn't do it," he said quickly to Smitty. "Hell no. But she won't know that."

"Be very effective," Smitty said and rose and turned his back and gazed out the window. He put his hands in his pockets, rocked up on his toes, sighed. "Well, well," he said, looking out over the lights. "None of them went out."

"What?"

Smitty shrugged and sat down again. "Well," he said, "then it's up to Wilcox. Do you know where they are now?"

"In bed." He cleared his throat. "I know where they are all right. Her car—her car, hell!—*my* car's parked at his place."

"Probably the pictures should be as intimate as possible."

"They'll be intimate." He cleared his throat again ; something had happened to his voice. He lifted his glass, which he hadn't touched, drank, and made a face. "They'll be intimate," he said. "I'll make that bitch pose with that damn ratnose Bannerman so intimate we can take prints down to Tijuana and sell them for two bucks a peek."

Smitty held up a hand. He had his smile back and under control. "Don't get involved in any more profitable sidelines I have to sweat over whether or not to declare," he said. "All right, then everything depends on tonight. Now, what about all these fulminations against Hattie? Are you going to call that note?"

"No," he said. "I don't know. Wait on that. I don't know." He slid down in his chair. He held up his glass. But he didn't want any more liquor, he was sick of liquor. He put the glass down on the rug beside his chair.

"You seem to be having quite a bit of trouble with your women. However, there's always faithful old Ardath, isn't there?"

"What the hell do you mean?" he whispered. "You think you're being funny?"

"I guess I wasn't. Sorry."

"You don't want me to call that note of Hat's, do you, Smitty?"

"Makes no difference to me. I only work here."

"Yeah," he said. "Well, you're goddam right. I'm having trouble with women all right. One of these days I'm going to take a vacation and get about three thousand miles away from women." He scrubbed his hand savagely back through his hair. "How the hell did she ever have the guts?" he said. "Well, I'll fix her." The little hands clutched at his leg. "What time is it?" he said to Smitty.

"Little after ten."

"Two hours," he said. Smitty was beginning to look as though he would like to go. But Ardath wouldn't be back for at least an hour, probably more, and he didn't want to sit alone. Smitty's glass was empty.



He got up. His right leg felt weak, as though it had gone to sleep. Jesus Christ, the poor little kid. "How about another drink, Smitty?" he said and put out his hand for Smitty's glass. "

"I guess not," Smitty said. "No thanks."

He still held out his hand, but Smitty didn't give him the empty glass. Smitty just looked at him with mild, distant amusement, and he felt fury and loneliness sweeping over him until he could hardly trust himself to speak. He said, with an effort to say it casually, "You might as well have one. You're going to stick around here till I get damn good and ready to go."

"Glad to," Smitty said and got up. "But I'd just as soon get it myself, thanks." He took his glass out to the kitchen.

## Sunday 7

RICHARD BANNERMAN was in Geneva in his little room on the *troisième étage* of the pension on the Quai Gustav Ador. He was there, vividly. There was the window looking out over the lake and the *jet d'eau*, which was turned off now because it was autumn, and there across the lake were the buildings rising faintly in the mist, and above them and above the lake the white mountains. There was the International School of Political Science across the lake where he had enrolled the year after the war because knowledge would save the world from itself ; and farther to the north across the lake were the League of Nations buildings, empty and reverberating, invisible in the mist. Yes, he must be in Geneva, in his bed in his little room, because he was crying, he could hear himself crying very clearly, and it was the only time he had cried since he had been a boy, because he had just quit school, given up, hopeless, and when he had come here he had been so full of hope. If he just knew enough, he had thought, he could help, do

something, even actually cure everything himself with his determination and the knowledge that he would gain. But there was no help. There was nothing he could do, anyone could do, and he had quit school and now he was crying in the night.

It was uncomfortable in his bed. His neck ached. He was cold. Suddenly his eyes snapped open to bright light; he had been asleep on the couch in the living room. The lamp threw a funnel of light over him, and on the book beside him on the floor and on the highball glass with an inch of liquor in the bottom. Still he heard the crying.

Bea Gregory was in the bedroom, crying, and for the sake of both of them he'd better get her out of his bed and out of the house.

He sat up, trying to shake the sleep out of his head. Earlier he'd made a reservation for her at the hotel and had tried to get her up, but she had been as limp and senseless as a dead woman. So he had lain down on the couch to read—and had gone to sleep.

He rose and went into the bedroom. He could dimly see her in the darkness, lying face down with her hands clenched in the pillow, sobbing hopelessly. "I guess I'd better take you down to the hotel, Bea," he said. Immediately that seemed very hardhearted, but she didn't move, and there was no break in the sobbing. He stood over her, grimacing. What else was there but the hotel? There was no one else he could take her to; he had thought of Hattie, but that seemed too bitter an irony. He stood there listening to the quietly shattering sound of her grief. He sat down on the edge of the bed. He lay down beside her and began to stroke her back. The muscles were as hard and taut as wires under tension. "It's going to be all right," he whispered. "It's going to be all right, Bea," and felt profoundly ashamed of the meaninglessness of what he was saying. She made no sign that she had heard, although, presently, under his hand he felt a slight relaxation of the flesh, and her sobbing slowed. He whispered, "It's going to be all right, Bea, it's going to be all right," whispering it over

and over and gently stroking her straining back, and finally felt her back go soft. Her face remained buried in the pillow. His hands brushed the bare skin and down over the tight sheath of her slip, and he stared at the bank of parallel lines of the venetian blinds, at the dark bulk of the dresser, chair, his bar bells in the corner. The seal was watching him from the corner, balanced on its tail, flippers folded over its breast, face expressionless and keen—watching him. He stroked Bea Gregory's back and whispered, "It's going to be all right, Bea, it's going to be— Bea—"

He came half awake at the sound of a stealthy movement. A huge silent bomb exploded in his eyes.

He heard Bea cry out. He sat up, blinded. Figures moved in another white explosion. The white flame remained burning in his eyes even when the source had gone, and the two figures still moved, dim, blurred, grotesque, and horrible. One figure leaned over the bed, and there was a sound of tearing cloth. Bea cried out again, cried his name this time.

"Take another one!" a voice said. "Get her like that!" A figure raised something high. Once more there was the terrific blinding flame.

It was a flashbulb, and the object the other man held was a camera, and it had been Bill Gregory's voice.

"*Oh no!*" Bea screamed.

"Again," Bill Gregory said. "Stick out your tits again, honey!" and laughed shrilly as the flash exploded.

He, Dick, swung off the bed and started for the man with the camera. Something slammed into his neck and he staggered but did not stop; he caught the camera. It was wrested away. The man with the camera cursed. He caught it again. Something crashed against his back but he hardly felt it. He had both hands on the camera.

The explosion of white flame came not in his eyes this time but in his groin. He screamed, and strength slipped out of him and he was on the floor groaning and gasping for breath, the white flame incredible and intolerable in his groin.

"That's plenty," a voice said distantly. "Let's go."

"Sleep happy, kiddies," Bill Gregory said with the shrill jarring laugh.

Bill Gregory and the other man had left the room. He tried to rise; he caught hold of the foot of the bed and tried to pull himself upright. He heard one of them bang against something in the living room and curse. Standing, he gripped the foot of the bed tightly, swaying and trying not to groan. He pressed his hands to his crotch, trying to press the pain away. It remained, solid and fierce and pulsing, and turned to nausea so that he must fight both the nausea and the pain.

"Bea," he said hoarsely. She was sitting up in her torn slip, her hands and arms crossed over her breast, her face a faint triangular patch of white in the darkness. Outside he heard a car starting, another, heard the sounds of the cars receding. Then there was no sound but the low long keening of Bea's sobs.

**MONDAY**



# Monday 1

IT WAS seven o'clock when Hattie woke. She looked at the bedside clock, at the gray of the window—fog! She closed her eyes; they popped open again. Usually she woke at exactly eight-fifteen without having set the alarm, but yesterday and today she had awakened at seven. A throwback to some other period of her life, she thought; when she had worked in Los Angeles probably, and had that hellish drive from Santa Monica, with the sun in her eyes all the way. Or in New York when there had been the long subway ride.

It was seven o'clock, Monday morning. She was wide awake; she might as well get up, trot through her exercises, take a shower, breakfast, get ready to go downtown. A big day, but the fast, tight schedule she usually enjoyed was broken today, and meaningless. To hell with the exercises and the shower. She got up and in her pyjamas went into the kitchen to make herself a cup of coffee. While the water was boiling she stood in the living room, watching the fog blowing in from the ocean in thick steady chunks of gray wool. She looked at the couch where Bill had sat last night. The stain on the carpet was still visible.

Carrying her cup of coffee back to her bedroom, she glanced into Keith's room. He had not cleared out completely. An open bureau drawer showed a snarl of socks and T-shirts.

Three metal clothes hangers lay on the floor, and under the chair was a pair of dirty sweat socks. She went to pick them up, and, holding them gingerly in one hand, her coffee in the other, she took the socks to the laundry hamper in the bath room, and took the coffee back to bed.

She lit a cigarette, propped the pillow behind her back, and considered her day. Maybe she wouldn't go in to the shops.

Why should she? The downtown shop would tick along just fine, and anyway it was not long for this world; she could call the Calvin Credit Jewellers representative in Los Angeles just as well from home. Fox in La Jolla could go on stewing about her personnel problems. Maybe the girl would quit, which would save firing her. On the phone she could list the house for sale with the real-estate agent, and do some spadework toward selling the Coronado store.

She looked out the window at the fog, gray, gray, gray.

She should call Dick Bannerman to see if Keith had spent the night there.

She had to talk to Mary-Lynn Sieber.

"Oh, my God," she said aloud and finished her coffee. She put out her cigarette. Her mouth tasted bitter and gummy; she knew better than to smoke before breakfast.

She got up and did her exercises and went into the bathroom to take a shower. She stripped and looked at herself in the mirror over the washstand. "No droop, no spread, no varicose veins," she said. But she ought to stay out of the sun for a while; she was getting too dark, which made her face look like shoe leather—and thought it would have been a good thing if she'd drooped and spread and got varicose veins ten years ago and looked like an old shoe. In the shower she stood with her shoulders slumped and the hot water beating on her back, wondering how she was going to find the courage to talk to Mary-Lynn Sieber.

She had dressed, eaten breakfast, read the paper, and was sitting over her third cup of coffee, her fourth cigarette, when the phone rang. She snatched it up.

"Hattie? Smitty."

"Oh, hello," she said, and she was pretty sure what this was going to be.

"A word of warning about Bill," Smitty said, "who is being very much Wild Bill Gregory. Maybe you already know what I'm talking about."

"I think so."

"Well, he's down on women in general. On you too for some



reason. I thought I'd better warn you that he may demand payment on that note. I don't think he will, but he might. Maybe you'd better be prepared."

"I'm prepared. He can't hurt me, Smitty."

"I don't like to say I told you so, but I wish you'd taken my advice a long time ago and talked to him about changing that paper over into a long-term note with stipulated monthly payments."

With interest, she thought. "I kept meaning to, Smitty," she said, "but the opportune moment never seemed to arrive."

"Yes. Well, I wanted to say—if you need a couple of thousand to help cover, let me know, will you?"

"Thanks, Smitty," she said. "Well—thanks. But I'll be all right."

"Fine. As I say, I wouldn't worry too much, but bear the possibility in mind."

When he had hung up she felt a little teary; that had been white of Smitty. He had spoken to her several times about that note, had said he would talk to Bill about it himself if she wanted him to, but she had put it off. Like so many other things where Bill was concerned, there had never been an opportune moment because she had never had the courage to make one. She sighed and gave the operator Dick Bannerman's number. There was no answer. She stared down at the phone, remembering the look on Bill's face as he had run out last evening. Bea Gregory and Dick Bannerman. Her hand trembled as she picked up the coffee cup and stared as though to glimpse there what had happened. But she didn't want to know what had happened.

Dick had mentioned that Keith was going to work for him. Maybe Keith was already swinging a pick or shovel. She looked up Douglas Bogan's number in the book, sighed again as she waited for the operator to ring. Bogan answered. Hoping he wouldn't recognise her voice, she asked for Mary-Lynn.

"Hello?" Mary-Lynn said.

"This is Keith's mother, Mary-Lynn."

**"Oh. Hello, Mrs. Rankin."**

**"I'd like to talk to you. Can you meet me at the hotel coffee chop in half an hour?"**

**"Gee, I'm sorry, Mrs. Rankin. Gee, I guess I can't. Aunt Grace and I have to go into La Jolla shopping and—"**

**"Have you seen Keith this morning?"**

**"No, I haven't, Mrs. Rankin. I don't know—"**

**"Do you think you'll be back by ten-thirty or so? Why don't you try to meet me at the coffee shop, and we'll have a cup of coffee? Just us girls," she said and grimaced. "I've got some things to discuss with you."**

**"Well, I'll try, Mrs. Rankin."**

**There was a strained silence. She felt herself grimacing again. "I'll see you then," she said quickly, just as Mary-Lynn said "Good-bye" and hung up.**

**She stared at the phone and felt the terrible antipathy, and knew it was wrong. She told herself this was just the way mothers felt about their sons' girl friends when it got too serious, and told herself she must try to understand Mary-Lynn and Mary-Lynn's side of this, to remember that Mary-Lynn was only eighteen—or nineteen, for Keith had said she was eight months older—remember how she had been at that age, how she had felt toward older people, toward boys, toward everything. It shrivelled her insides to remember how she had been at nineteen. She had hated everyone, including Keith and the poor trumpet player who had got her with Keith and who had died in 1742 of an overdose of cocaine or of some bad cocaine. She had heard it from a bandleader in Los Angeles who had known Bunny and had heard it via the grapevine. All he knew was that Bunny was dead of the snow, he didn't know where. It was another thing she had never told Keith.**

**By ten-fifteen she had phoned the local real-estate agent to come down and look at her house and help her decide what she ought to try to get for it, phoned the Calvin Credit Jewellers' representative in Los Angeles to say she would consider an offer of six thousand dollars for the rest of the year's lease**

and next year's option on the downtown store. She changed into a new black shirtmaker dress and a gray cashmere cardigan, and drove slowly up toward the hotel. As she passed the post office, from where the house that Dick Bannerman was building was visible, she looked for Keith. But the people working around the framework of two-by-fours were indistinct shapes in the fog.

She parked her car and went into the hotel. A placard on a stand in the lobby announced that Charley Denning and his band would be playing on the terrace every Saturday night. Featuring June Grant. She nodded to Mr. Miorelli, the manager, at the desk, remembering when she had sung with Bunny's band. It had been for only a few weeks, when she was carrying Keith, and she had had to quit when she became too obviously pregnant. After she had Keith, Bunny didn't ask her to sing again. It was something she had not been good at. She wondered why she was recalling all that old misery now. In the coffee shop she took a booth near the back and waited for Mary-Lynn as day before yesterday she had waited for Bill. But she was remembering all the unhappiness very vividly, when she was nineteen and everything in the world had been a raw deal.

Mary-Lynn arrived promptly. She watched the girl Keith was in love with come down the aisle between the booths and thought she looked very posed, older than nineteen, very attractive. She was not the cuddly-kitten type, nor did she look particularly hard. But there was that wariness about her. Mary-Lynn looked much as she herself had at that age, although she had probably looked tougher, sulkier, and even more wary. She had not known how to dress so well. Obviously this was a new dress, chocolate linen with a straight skirt and boat neck, and new spectator shoes. The dress had come from one of her shops, she realized. From the La Jolla shop, bought this morning for thirty-two fifty.

Wondering what it meant, she smiled as Mary-Lynn came up to the booth. The girl smiled nervously in return and slid into the seat opposite her with a studied, lithe movement. Mary-

Lynn wore the dress very well.

"I hope I'm not terribly late, Mrs. Rankin."

"You're not late at all. I hope I didn't spoil your shopping trip."

"Oh no," Mary-Lynn said. Her smile was shy, but studied shy. She turned it on the waitress, who came to the table with menus. Both ordered black coffee. She wondered if Mary-Lynn felt it was somehow an advantage to be wearing a dress bought in her shop. Mary-Lynn lit a cigarette, and she lit one too, studying as she did so, the young, tan, smooth face opposite her. She knew that what she was feeling now was jealousy because at nineteen she had not been this attractive, this poised, and if she could see through it, how much easier it must have been to see through her.

"Well," she said, "I want to talk to you about Keith. It seems the two of you have been talking about getting married."

Mary-Lynn's smile now came from a little below the top layer, warier, slightly bleak. "Yes, he's asked me, Mrs. Rankin." She was sliding up and down over her wrist a thin silver bracelet hung with silver charms—a shoe, a hammer, a heart, four or five tiny coins. "But I don't think we should get married yet," she said. "I think he should finish college first. Don't you, Mrs. Rankin?"

"Yes," she said.

"Oh, I do too."

She smiled to herself at that exchange. "I've been afraid he might want to quit though," she said. "Just to—oh, as a gesture."

"He's just talking like that," Mary-Lynn said and wrinkled her nose. "You know how they are."

The waitress came with the two cups of coffee and a check. She picked up the check as Mary-Lynn looked at it uncertainly.

"You're not worried about that, are you, Mrs. Rankin?" Mary-Lynn asked.

"As a matter of fact, I am. I think Keith's too young to get married, and I think quitting college would be something he'd regret. I know it. I'm not saying I think *you're* too young to

get married. But I've been hoping you would be intelligent about Keith's situation. Having talked to you a little I know you will be."

Mary-Lynn flushed.

"Look—are you in love with him?" she asked.

Mary-Lynn bowed her head so that her dark hair swung forward over her cheeks. "Yes," she whispered.

It was so phony she almost choked. Oh, Keith, you poor kid!

"He's pretty upset, isn't he, Mary-Lynn?"

Mary-Lynn nodded.

She said with difficulty, "Well, he's not going to talk to me. That's why I wanted to talk to you. Even if you're only a year older, you're a lot older. Women always are. I've got to depend on you to see that he doesn't do anything foolish."

It had been a bid to enlist Mary-Lynn on her side, but as Mary-Lynn watched her, the smoke from her cigarette rising in front of her face, she knew that Mary-Lynn was on only one side.

"As a matter of fact, he asked me to marry him before—before this," Mary-Lynn said.

"Yes," she said. "Well, I just think it's so important that he go on with college. He'd probably be drafted pretty quick if he quit. I think they draft them even if they're married. And then he'd be sent to Korea. When he came back, with no college degree and a wife and maybe a kid, then what?" She drew a deep breath, and she was thinking of Korea now, and the pictures of the dead boys in the mud along the sides of the roads.

"And you see," she went on. "He may have to put himself through college from now on. Maybe I can help him, but I'm in a little trouble and I'm going to have to chuck a couple of my shops—" She stopped abruptly. My God, how phony that must sound.

"Oh, not really!" Mary-Lynn said.

"Really."

"Oh, I don't believe that."

"Happens to be true."

She watched the layer of poise crack for a moment, showing shock, fright, anger. Mary-Lynn said in a thin voice, "That's a pretty stinking thing to say to me. As though I—"

"It happens to be true, Mary-Lynn."

"Well, Keith never—"

"Keith doesn't know."

"Because it's *not* true!" Mary-Lynn said. "You just said that because you hate me, because your dear darling son—Well, I don't believe it! And if that's the way you're going to be, well, I can be that way too!"

Fascinated, she watched the play of emotions on Mary-Lynn's face, the anger, the fright, the assertion. "You can't stop me from marrying him if I want to!" Mary-Lynn said. "I'll just see, that's all I know what you think of me now, all right. Who do you think you are? Do you think you're the only one that can do it by yourself? Well, you're not."

Mary-Lynn stopped.

Do what all by myself? she wondered.

Mary-Lynn said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Rankin. I didn't mean to—" Then her lips tightened and she slid out of the booth. She stood up very straight and looked around to see if anyone nearby was listening. She said in a low voice, "No, I'm not sorry! You can't scare me, and I don't believe your old lies about selling your shops. Intelligent—well, I'm as smart as you are, and I'm not going to marry any old trumpet player either. I'll marry Keith if it's—"

Mary-Lynn stopped again, and swung away with a dignity she had to admire. Mary-Lynn's heels racketed on the tile floor with a driving sound that reminded her acutely of the sound of her own heels. The girl hurried out of the coffee shop with her back stiff and straight and a jaunty swing to the skirt of the thirty-two-fifty dress.

Do what by myself? she wondered. "Poor old trumpet player," she whispered, looking down at the cold black coffee in the bottom of her cup. She dropped the stub of her cigarette into it. Not the only one who can do what? she wondered. She

sat there, watching her cigarette drown in the coffee, watching it turn brown and ugly, the tobacco grains showing through like dead intestines. I'm so good at everything, she thought. So good at everything except being a mother, except dealing with Bill the other day and Mary-Lynn today, so good at everything except anything that mattered. She wondered how she could possibly have made it any worse.

## Monday 2

GRAY light filtered into the bedroom through the venetian blind, long parallel lines of black and gray. Drugged, emotionless, aching, Bea gazed at the light through barely open eyes. She remembered a phone ringing somewhere in the distance, hours ago. And before that, in the night—

She sat up, gasping with the effort; but the pain was no longer localized, her body felt stiff all over, her face stiff. She sat there and with a slow motion of her head glanced down at her torn slip and bra, her breasts where she had fed Billy and looked down at him with this same inclination of her head to see his face peaceful and rapt in the sucking, his eyes opening from time to time to contemplate her breast, his eyes contemplating nourishment and endless pleasure and peace. That might better have come from a bottle, Bill had said. The photographs would show her breasts small and useless.

The fierce lights and the camera and the hand tearing at her breast and Richard groaning on the floor—in a sudden terror that they would come again, she swung her legs off the bed and tried to get up. She could barely stand. She felt herself leaning as though at a precarious slant, and had to wait for something in her to swing upright, like the long slow roll of a boat. But they would not need to come again.

She moved across to the door. As her hand gripped the knob she saw the oblong of paper. Thumbtacked to the door was a note in pencil on the back of an envelope: "*Had to get crew started. Be back every hour on the hour.*"

She opened the door and went into the bathroom and ran hot water into the bathtub. In the mirror her eyes were puffy with tears and sleep, her mouth swollen into a kind of awful caricature of a passionate, pouting mouth. The reflection in the mirror was slowly clouded over by the steam from the rushing hot-water faucet.

She soaked in the tub for a long time, and when she got out she was weak from the heat. In the bedroom she found a safety pin in the little iron box on top of the dresser; she sorted through the miscellany there, gold studs, several pairs of cuff-links, bright-striped battle ribbons, a Stevenson button, pennies, pencil stubs, paper clips, another safety pin. She managed to pin up her slip and bra, put on her blouse, her skirt, her shoes. In the corner of the bedroom was a long iron bar, to either end of which were fastened red iron plates.

She found another note in the kitchen: "*Coffee in pot on stove. Eggs, bacon, cantaloupe in refrigerator. Back shortly.*"

She went outside. Her ankle had begun to burn and throb painfully. Fog drifted up the hill from the ocean, gray and damp. She could feel the dampness collecting on her face as she looked for the MG. But it was gone; Bill would have taken it last night. It was his car. She turned to face down the hill. The fog swept up at her like massed hurrying ghosts, blown against her damply and blown on past, but always more and more coming. Four blocks down the hill to the highway, another block to Ocean Avenue, three long blocks to the left along Ocean Avenue. She didn't know if she could do it.

She was thankful for the fog when she had started. An occasional car passed her, with headlights or parking lights on, but she didn't see the red pickup truck. At the end of each block she stopped to rest and take her weight off her burning ankle. She reached the highway and leaned thankfully against the pole where the switch for the traffic signal was, until the



cars squealed to a stop on the highway and she could limp across. She reached Ocean Avenue and started to the left. She could hear the low muffled crashing of the waves now, but she could not see the ocean in the fog; and in the fog the street looked unfamiliar, as though she had been gone a long time, or as though it were a street leading to a house she had only dreamed about once, where her son was—who was only another part of the dream. She would have to fight for him, Richard had said; she remembered Richard saying it, his face still contorted with pain, Richard staring at her steadily as he said it. But he did not know, as she knew, that the pictures had been taken so that she could not fight.

She had not tried to explain about the pictures. She had only nodded when Richard said the photographs were just a convention. This was the age of the smear, Richard had said, the age when it mattered too much what all the others thought of you, when sin was only a little ball rolling to settle in a numbered groove, and then the faked dirty pictures or the vaguely hinted-at pink card. Not tragedy, Richard had said, because tragedy required pity as well as terror.

She would have to fight, Richard had said, staring at her; everyone had to fight. She had nodded. But she knew she had been irrevocably smashed and defeated before she had even known there was anything to fight about.

Bill's house appeared out of the fog. She stopped, and knew she did not have the courage. The high prongs of the TV antenna were invisible, Billy's little car was still parked beside the porch; she could see the rear of the MG in the garage, which was open. Bill's car was not there. Bill had taken Billy away.

She moved past the house and went up the walk to the back door. It was unlocked. Dishes were stacked in the sink. Two coffee cups stood upside down on the drainboard. "Mrs. Haver?" she whispered at the door of the housekeeper's room. There was no answer. When she pushed the door open she saw that Mrs. Haver's things were gone. The room was as empty and neat as though no one had ever slept there.

She started as she heard a voice speaking in a low, hurried monotone. It came from the living room. She turned to face the sound and willed herself toward it. From the kitchen doorway, across the dining room, she could see the flickering of the TV screen, hear the voice more plainly. Then she saw Billy sitting on the floor in front of the TV, surrounded by his fleet of toy cars and trucks. The trucks were all loaded with poker chips. "Try a pack *today!*" the man on the TV screen said, smiled fixedly, and disappeared.

She almost called Billy's name, but as she stepped forward she saw the man lying on the couch. She shrank back.

Billy looked up. He made an inarticulate sound and scrambled up and ran to her. She caught him in her arms.

"Hello, darling, darling, darling," she whispered in his ear. He put his arms around her neck, pressed his hard little skull against her cheek. The man sat up; his thick black hair was matted at the back of his head, and in the small light from the TV his face looked gray. He might be the man who had taken the photographs, but she felt no fear of him.

"Say!" he said. "Listen, Mrs. Gregory, you're not supposed to be here."

Billy twisted around in her arms as she moved across the dining area, throwing her off balance. She winced as a knife of pain cut into her leg. Billy said, "This is my mmmmmmmmm-mother!"

"Yeah, but she's not—" The man got up and took an uncertain step toward her, then retreated to switch off the TV. "Listen, Mrs. Gregory, I got orders."

Billy wriggled, and she let him down. He had on the same shirt and short pants he had worn yesterday. "Are you all right, darling?" she whispered.

He nodded. His eyes inspected her face, and he frowned severely and turned away. "Billy!" she whispered, but he wouldn't look at her. She had tried so hard never to let him see or hear anything like what happened yesterday. But what he had seen and heard had been the most terrible. He reached for her hand. She wondered if the man would leave if she

threatened to call the sheriff. She wondered how to do it without making a scene in front of Billy ; or just go, she and and Billy, and disappear.

"Listen, lady," the man said, "I know how it is and all that, but you got to beat it. You're not supposed to be here. I got orders." He was big and looked flabby. His trousers were wrinkled over his thighs and he wore a greasy green jacket.

"We're going," she said and held Billy's hand tightly.

"Uh-uh," the man said, shaking his head. "He's getting an injunction so you can't—" He jerked his head at Billy.

She looked down at her son. He dissolved in her eyes. His hand slipped out of hers. "Mother, what's an in—"

"Never mind, darling."

"I'm sorry, lady, but that's the way it is. He took some prints with him. He's probably got it already. You're probably in contempt of court already."

She felt herself nodding. "Please," she said and tried not to sound as though she were begging. "I'll just stay a minute."

"Mrs. Haver wuh-wuh-went away," Billy said.

"Did she, darling?"

"Dddd-daddy says this mmm-man's Mrs. Haver now. Ddd-addy pays him forty dollars to be nursemaid, Ddd-daddy said. He's got a gun, Mommy! Like cowboys! He shot bad people with it. What's a sss-striker?"

"Lady, you're just going to make it tough on me and on yourself," the man said impatiently. "He's got the injunction by now, I'm telling you."

"All right," she said. She knelt beside Billy and smiled at him. "Give me a kiss, Billy. I have to go now."

"I don't want you to go away again!" Billy wailed and backed away from her. He looked as though he were going to cry. He turned away and pouted, then glanced back at her out of the corner of his eyes. "Ddd-daddy said he wouldn't ever ddd-do it."

She didn't know what to say. She stood up.

Billy said, "Mommy, will you ppp-push me up the hill so I can—"

"No, dear," she said quickly. "You stay in here and maybe

this man will play with you. I really must go now." The man was lighting a cigarette, frowning. "But I'll be back very soon," she lied. She stepped over to embrace Billy, but he backed away, his face screwed up sulkily.

She started for the door, trying not to limp. She smiled at Billy over her shoulder, praying he wouldn't cry. Billy stood where she had left him, his hands tucked into the top of his pants, looking down and kicking the toe of his shoe into the carpet.

"You be a good boy now, won't you, darling?"

"I don't want you to ggggggggo away again," Billy said, but he wasn't crying. She stumbled going out the door and swung around to close it quickly behind her. The tears streamed down her face. "Bye-bye, darling," she whispered as she limped out to the sidewalk in the drifting fog.

She halted there. Her mind seemed to have stopped, run down. There was nothing she could do now, no place she could go now—she could not go back to Richard's again. She looked to the left. Three long blocks, then a block up a hill, to the hotel. She knew she could not walk that far.

A block to the right was Hattie Rankin's home.

She started to walk to Hattie's. Each step was an individual effort, each one more difficult than the last, and before she had gone even halfway she realized that this was Monday, that Hattie, who worked, would of course not be at home. But she continued. She went around Hattie's house to the boardwalk, where the front door was, rang the bell, and leaned against the door frame with her eyes closed.

She heard footsteps. The door was opened, and Hattie was there in a black dress and gray sweater. "Hello, Bea," she said.

"Can I come in? I've sprained my ankle. I can't walk any—"

Hattie caught her arm as she started forward. Hattie's sharp dark eyes examined her face. Hattie's hand gripped her arm tightly.

"If I could just sit down a minute," she said, and Hattie helped her to the couch. She sank down on it. Immediately all

her strength was gone and wild sobs broke loose.

Hattie stared down at her, her face hard and harsh. "He beat you up."

"I can't see Billy any more!" she cried. "He's got an injunction. I can't—" Saying the words even, she could not face them. But growing, coiling, behind them, was the vast, terrible meaning and loss. "I can't see him any more," she said.

Hattie sat down beside her and put an arm around her. It seemed so weird that it should be Hattie, when over the years there had been the effort to greet Hattie, smile at and chat with Hattie, as though she knew nothing.

"What happened?" Hattie said. "Are you getting a divorce, Bea?"

"I guess he is." She closed her eyes, as though to keep herself from seeing it still. She lay down on the couch. She felt Hattie staring down at her.

"Listen!" Hattie said. "You get a good lawyer! Have you got a good lawyer?"

"It wouldn't be any use."

"Don't be a fool!"

She shook her head. She put her hands over her face; it made her breathing sound ragged and loud. "They took pictures last night," she said through her hands. "Of Richard and me."

"Pictures," Hattie said and was silent for a time. "You mean Bill got a detective with a camera and— Oh, my *God!* Listen!" she said fiercely. "Oh no, he doesn't! He's not taking that little kid away from you. I'll perjure myself thirteen ways to— I don't need to. Photographs!"

She, Bea, was shaking her head slowly, her hands to her face. Because Hattie, like Richard, did not understand why the pictures had been taken. "No," she said and felt the tears running in crooked cool tracks down her cheeks. "No, nobody can do anything. But—"

"But what?"

"If I could just see him once in a while."

Hattie made a disgusted sound. "That's the way to do," she

said distantly. "Break their backs and they don't have any backbone." Then she said, "Are you going to marry Dick, Bea?"

"Oh no. It wasn't anything. It was all a mistake."

Hattie was silent again.

She supposed Hattie didn't understand, but there was no more she could say about it.

"I'll get you some Kleenex," Hattie said. "If there's any left."

Hattie's heels rapped rapidly out of the room, returned. Hattie bent over her, her face soft now, and mopped at her eyes with a wad of tissue.

"Oh, thanks," she said and took the tissue and wiped at her eyes herself. They kept flowing with a gentle, easy ache.

"You're welcome to stay here," Hattie said in that abrupt way she had. "Got an empty bedroom. You stay here as long as you want. I'll get hold of Dick and——"

"No."

"Listen, what do you mean, it was a mistake? Is he running out on you? Is he— I can't see him doing anything like—"

"No!" she said, looking up at Hattie pleadingly. "It isn't anything like that. There isn't anything, really."

Hattie stared down at her, hands on hips, grimacing. "You poor, beat-up, pushed-around kid! Well, we'll see. You stay right here till we see what's going to happen. A kind of rest home for mothers." Hattie let out her breath in a sharp, bitter exhalation. "No one can say it isn't hell, trying to be one."

The tears came faster, and she daubed at them helplessly with the soaked wad of tissues. It's all I've got, she said, but not aloud. And now she was seeing all of it behind her closed streaming eyelids, seeing her one small worth and task and preciousness in the world snatched away so that she was crossed off and useless, sinking and turning slowly with the distant explosion of the flashbulbs, sinking and sinking, deeper and deeper, and knowing there was no bottom to it. It's all I had, she thought.

## Monday 3

KEITH did not know what time it was when he woke. His watch had stopped. He sat, shoulders slumped, on the edge of the bed in the motel room, looking down at his stopped watch. He wound it. His pants were in a heap on the floor beside the bed, and he fished out his wallet and counted the bills in it. Forty-one bucks, and some change in his pocket. How everything cost. You had your car greased and the oil changed, and whonk. You had dinner at a café, whonk. Five bucks a night at the motel. Now he had to buy breakfast. Well, tomorrow he would go to work. Maybe he wouldn't eat any breakfast. He didn't feel hungry.

He sat on the bed in his pyjama bottoms and wondered what time it was and looked around the room. There was the bed, an uncomfortable easy chair, a little dresser with a mirror over it, a radio on a low table. You had to sink two bits in the radio to play it for an hour. Two bits an hour to hear that crappy little brown plastic radio play and Dick had said he would pay him a dollar fifty an hour for digging soil-pipe ditches; the radio was worth one-sixth as much as he was. Last night he had played it for an hour before he went to sleep—some record program where there'd be three minutes of knocked-out music to make you tap your foot, a commercial to get you to buy something, three minutes of sweet stuff so you'd think about your girl and how wonderful she was or how sad it was, then another commercial and some more knocked-out. He rose and went over to see if he'd left the radio on, but it was off. It turned itself off as soon as your two-bits ran out.

He stood uncertainly before the radio. Out the window there was fog, thick as hell this morning. Cars ran along the highway with their headlights burning mistily and their tyres making wet zipping sounds. It was probably too early to go

up and see Mary-Lynn and anyway there was that business of Dick Bannerman and the liquor—he had to think about that before he went up there. He thought of Mrs. Gregory's bruised face—that was the worst thing he had ever done. Every time he thought about it, it got worse, in a kind of slowly opening horror.

Moving rapidly, he put on his slacks, a T-shirt, his sweater, rolled up his pants legs, and barefoot, went out to walk along the beach in the fog.

It was cold and damp. Droplets collected on his face, and he had to keep wiping them off. He walked through the loose white sand down to the water's edge, and, where the sand was darker and harder and slick, began to run. He ran for a long way before he slowed to a walk. The sound of the waves seemed very loud. He would hear them crash crisply over on themselves, then, after an interval, see the white breaks appear in the fog, rushing in toward him and dwindling away to sweep up around his feet and slide back again, leaving the little dimples in the sand where the sand crabs bored down away from the surface; then another distant crash, the white line appearing, another wave sweeping up around his feet, and always the fog blowing in swiftly, sometimes very dense, sometimes thinning, as though it would pull apart into separate little clouds.

He picked up smooth stones and threw them at the clumps of seaweed and watched the sandflies swarm up and poise, warily, before they descended again. He passed a dead seal washed up on the beach, sleek and dark and shining with moisture. It didn't stink yet, so evidently it had just died, or been killed—the fishermen shot them when they got in their nets.

The dead seal depressed him, and he moved up away from the water's edge until he could dimly see the houses along the beach. Lights burned in almost all of them; people getting up and getting ready to go to work. He saw the tall TV antennae; there was Bill Gregory's house, the biggest one along here. He stared at it, whipping himself; Jesus, poor Mrs. Gregory. Hattie's house was a couple of hundred yards farther south.



He turned toward it, the sand gritting beneath his bare toes, walking in the fog alone, more alone than he had ever been. There was the Mayberry house; there was the one with the egg-crate overhang; there was the one with the bent TV antenna, then a vacant space like a mouth with a tooth missing, and then Hattie's house with a light burning somewhere in the back, in the kitchen, where maybe Hattie was drinking a cup of coffee. Go in and have a cup of coffee with her and say—

He rubbed a hand over his damp face and cursed, not at Hattie or even at himself, merely uttering the one harsh sibilant word, and turned and started back. He walked down along the water's edge again, where he could no longer see the houses, walking very slowly. He came upon the seal once more and squatted near it and looked at the three red raw holes in the sleek back and made three holes in the sand before him with a forefinger and cursed again. Go to her and say—what? Say: It's okay, Hattie, I— Forgiving her? Something broke in his mind, a kind of membrane, letting him plunge through into another chamber where he must get his bearings again. Because that wasn't right, to go and be real bitching keen about forgiving her. Nor did he actually forgive her. But go and say: Hey, I'm sorry I was such a goddam jerk, Hattie, but it was just a lot of things stacking up at once and you know how I just can't stand Bill Gregory. Excusing himself; but he did not excuse himself. Bill Gregory was no excuse. In the hope of killing him, Dick had said, and he hadn't understood, but thought suddenly, fiercely, of killing Bill Gregory, grinding it into himself that he was so much bigger than Bill Gregory and had been scared to hit him when he should have hit him, when Hattie had asked him to get Bill Gregory out of there. Well, he had got him out of there, all right, by yelling like a damn little kid, Nyah, Nyah, Nyah, and sucking on somebody else so Bill Gregory got out of there, all right, and went home and beat hell out of his wife. It was all a mistake, Mrs. Gregory had said, and she and Dick had not been shacking up at all and so he hadn't only sucked he

had lied, horribly, and so got her birded up how much worse even than Dick about the liquor. How the hell could he have done it! And then, for Chrissake, she'd forgiven him; you're forgiven, Dick had said, take it gracefully. Mrs. Gregory forgiving him about that and Dick forgiving him, because they recognized him as a big jerk kid, but he didn't forgive anybody, oh no! He went around with a suck-lemon mouth and his arms folded like a cartoon he'd seen once of a guy, with the caption "I Do Not Forget." Everybody worrying about him and putting bandages on where he'd kicked them trashing around, and only worrying about himself. How the hell could he be so horrible?

The dead seal's eye looked at him, chocolate brown and rimmed with dull white. Its forehead was deeply wrinkled, its mouth wore a pleasant expression. Poor damn thing, out catching fish, which was the way it made its living, and some fisherman blasting hell out of it with a shotgun. But catching fish was the way the fisherman made his living too, and the seal was tearing up his net. The seal's life wasn't worth anything to the fisherman, and the net was. He, Keith Rankin, was worth six small brown plastic radios, which was just about it. Damn jerk kid, Bill Gregory had said, and Bill Gregory was right. But he himself had been wrong, because Bill Gregory wasn't a cuckold. He didn't even have that; instead it was all a mistake, and Mrs. Gregory's face all bruised like that, and Mrs. Gregory forgiving him.

"Goddam it!" he said aloud and, clenching a handful of sand, rose. He flung the sand over the seal's wounds, swung around, and set off up the beach at a run.

When he got to Bill Gregory's house he was panting, but he didn't slow down until he had run up the incline above the beach and almost tripped over a kid's sandbox with toy cars and blocks of wood scattered in it. But he forced himself into a trot again, afraid that if he stopped he could not get himself going again, and he had to tell Bill Gregory that it had been a mistake yesterday and he had lied, tell Bill Gregory to go ahead and smack him one because he had made it up about

Dick Bannerman and Mrs. Gregory—that it was all a dirty lie. He rounded the corner of the house and took the steps before the front door at a jump and banged on the door.

Then he saw that Bill Gregory's Cadillac wasn't in the driveway or in the open garage. Bill Gregory wasn't home. It was Monday morning—what the hell had made him think Bill Gregory would be at home? He felt his resolution dribble away into relief. But it wasn't his fault that Bill Gregory wasn't at home, was it? Except that everything was his fault. Something in his chest swelled and pushed up into his throat as he heard heavy footsteps. The door opened. A fat-faced man in a green loafer jacket scowled at him.

"What do *you* want?"

"Is Mr. Gregory here?"

"He's not here."

He heard running footsteps, and Billy appeared behind the man. When Billy saw him his face darkened and he retreated. "Hi, Billy," he said, but Billy didn't answer. The fat-faced man stood there holding the door.

"Well, I guess—" he said. "I mean, do you know when he'll be home or anything?"

The fat-faced man, who was scratching his leg, shrugged. Billy had backed out of sight.

He stood there, despairing. He could tear things up in great style, but he couldn't ever fix them up again, could he? He could do all the wrong things just fine, but when he tried to do something right he didn't have the guts or it was too late or the guy was gone. "Well, thanks a lot," he said and moved down off the porch and through the yard to the beach and slowly back along the beach in the fog.

He phoned Mary-Lynn from the phone booth outside the motel office. Mary-Lynn wasn't there, the maid said. They'd gone shopping in La Jolla. Just a minute, boy, the maid said. If he was Keith Rankin, Mr. Bogan wanted to talk to him.

Mr. Bogan said, in a grim voice, that he wanted to see him. He didn't even hesitate. He said he would be right up.

Putting on his white bucks and his best sweater, then driving

up to Mr. Bogan's house, he tried to plan what he was going to say. He knew this was going to be about Dick Bannerman and the liquor, and about keeping Mary-Lynn out so late—both. Well, at least he could damn well fix it this time so that nobody was bitched but himself and take that like a man for a change. He snubbed his wheels against the curb in front of the house and strode up the walk to the front door, pulling his sweater down over his hips.

Mr. Bogan let him in. He had an unlit cigar in his mouth, wore a white shirt stretched tightly over his barrel chest and belly, a striped tie, and dark gray suit pants. His thick gray hair had just been combed and drops of water still shone along the part. Mr. Bogan didn't offer to shake hands as he led him into the living room and indicated that he was to sit down. Mr. Bogan lit his cigar.

"I wanted to talk to you about this drinking incident Saturday night," Mr. Bogan said and gave him the beady eye.

Sitting with his legs stretched out in front of him and his hands in his lap, he didn't feel scared any more, or angry. Hattie didn't think much of Mr. Bogan, he remembered. She had called him a squirt; he almost giggled at the thought. Mr. Bogan might be something very large-time down at the aircraft plant in San Diego, but that only meant he was worth more radios, and he was sure a squirt. "What about it, Mr. Bogan?" he said.

"How old are you?" Mr. Bogan said.

"Almost nineteen."

"Does your mother allow you to drink hard liquor?"

He almost said, "Sure," but caught himself in time. To Mr. Bogan that might be a reflection on Hattie. "No," would be a lie. He wasn't going to be a smart Alec; he wanted to handle this with dignity. He looked back at Mr. Bogan and didn't know what to say.

"No, I'm sure she doesn't," Mr. Bogan said. "She knows you're too young to be able to handle hard liquor."

That griped. He tried not to make a face.

"And it's against the law," Mr. Bogan said, "to serve liquor to minors." He sat down in an Eames chair and flicked ash

into an ashtray. "Isn't it?"

"Yes," he said and nodded.

Br. Bogan gave him the beady eye again. "I understand that your friend Bannerman got you and my niece over there Saturday night and fed you—"

"No, he didn't get us over there. I took Mary-Lynn over there and—"

"Nevertheless, he served you liquor."

"No," he said, shaking his head and looking down at his hands. "I took my own bottle. I'd bought a bottle." He stopped, thinking that he didn't want to bitch Mary-Lynn either now. "I didn't let Mary-Lynn see it because I didn't think she'd like it," he said quickly. "But I took it in, and that's what we drank."

Mr. Bogan's face had gone red. Mr. Bogan said, "Mary-Lynn told me—"

"I told you she didn't even see the bottle."

"Where did you get the—"

"I just got it."

"Stop interrupting me. I don't think much of your manners. Now, the fact remains that Bannerman served you and Mary-Lynn, both of you minors, liquor. It's against the law. He did, didn't he?"

"No," he said. He looked squarely into Mr. Bogan's eyes.

"You're lying."

He shrugged. "Well, you're trying to get Dick Bannerman in trouble, and I'm not going to let you do it. I brought in a bottle and he didn't see it, and I went out in the kitchen and mixed drinks for myself and Mary-Lynn. That's the way it was. He had a bottle of ginger-ale or something there, and he thought that's what we were drinking, but I was mixing drinks. He didn't serve Mary-Lynn or me anything. I did it."

"I suppose he didn't know you'd been drinking when you passed out and Mary-Lynn had to carry you out to the car," Mr. Bogan said angrily and showed his teeth around the butt of the cigar.

"He just thought I was birding around. I act pretty stupid

sometimes."

"I think you do."

He looked at his hands. His feeling of superiority was gone and now everything just seemed crummy. Why shouldn't Mr. Bogan act this way? He was responsible for Mary-Lynn while she was staying with him, and of course Mr. Bogan didn't like the idea of his taking Mary-Lynn out and getting drunk and driving around. It was pretty easy just to be mad at Mr. Bogan, but it was his own fault.

"I don't drink much," he said. "Once in a while we have drinks up at the house at Cal, but just on house parties mostly. I acted pretty stupid the other night and I'm sorry about it. But I was in some trouble—something pretty private or I'd—well, it doesn't matter. I got drunk, but Mary-Lynn didn't drink much and she was real good about everything, and I'm sorry I brought her in so late. It won't happen again."

"It certainly will not happen again."

He nodded, looking down.

"You're not to see Mary-Lynn any more while she's here," Mr. Bogan said. "Which will not be for long. And when she goes home I intend to warn her parents about you." He jabbed his cigar down into the ashtray and his face twisted as he rubbed it out. "You wild kids," he said. "Drinking and smoking marijuana and—I don't even want to know what else. They ought to— Well, it's the parents who ought to be furnished with big straps for kids like you. Except the parents are too busy getting drunk and—"

"Don't say anything about my mother," he said and got to his feet.

Mr. Bogan stared up at him and his eyes suddenly seemed to shrink. Mr. Bogan had taken what he'd just said as a threat, although he hadn't particularly meant it that way, and Mr. Bogan was afraid of him. It was a strange feeling. But of course he could beat hell out of Mr. Bogan, as he could have beat hell out of Bill Gregory. It was just that they were men and he was—well, what was he?

"Get out of here," Mr. Bogan said, and he sounded short of

breath.

"All right," he said and moved toward the door. Then he turned back. "I'm sorry you feel I can't see Mary-Lynn any more," he said. "That's pretty dumb, to try to do anything like that. Like don't put beans up your nose, you know? You ought to know we'll see each other if we really want to."

"Get out of here!" Mr. Bogan said without rising. "If you ever come around here again I'll call the sheriff. Do you understand that?"

He nodded and went on outside, bowing his head a little as he went through the doorway, as he always did, although this one was quite high. He was thinking of Mary-Lynn. In getting Dick Bannerman off the hook he'd probably bitched Mary-Lynn. Whatever he did he bitched somebody.

He drove slowly down to the highway and to the house Dick was building. One of the carpenters said Dick had gone home. The ground around the house looked hard as hell, and the trench for the soil pipe had to go all the way from the house to the street. He drove back up California Street to Dick's house. The red pickup truck was in the driveway. He got out and went up on the porch; through the screen door he could see Dick lying on the couch. With a quick jerk of his head Dick looked at him, swung his feet down, and sat upright.

"Oh," he said. "Hello, Keith."

"Can I come in?"

"Of course."

He stepped inside and put his hands back to catch the screen door as it sprang back behind him. Dick sat on the couch with a wooden, tired expression on his face, rubbing his hands together. "You haven't seen Mrs. Gregory anywhere about, have you?"

"No, I haven't, Dick. Why? Isn't she—"

"Looked everywhere I know to look," Dick said. "I even went down to their house. Looked off the end of the pier even. This bloody fog."

He didn't know what to say.

Dick sat there in his khaki shirt and pants, his neatly cropped

head with the hair receding sharply at the temples looking too small for his thick shoulders. He rubbed his hands together, staring straight ahead at nothing. He looked sick.

"Say, what's the matter, Dick? Did she go away or something? Do you want me to scout around and try—"

"She went away," Dick said. "Yes. And where was I? Down seeing that I wasn't losing any money on the workers' standing around. Economy ahead of sentiment. The universal hypocrisy of the bleeding-heart philosophy."

"Shall I drive around and try and find her or anything?"

Dick shrugged, shook his head, looked up blankly. "How is everything with you?"

"Well, I went up to see Mr. Bogan," he said. He moved over and sat down in the easy chair. Across from him hung a wild, blotchy picture, the frame off square. "Just now, I fixed it up about the liquor, I think. I'm sorry I fouled you up in that."

Dick frowned. "Keith, I told you to leave that alone."

"Well, I wasn't going to let you—"

"What did you tell him?"

"I said I'd brought my own bottle and sneaked drinks and you didn't know we were drinking."

"You haven't talked to Mary-Lynn about this, have you?"

"I didn't get a chance to."

"If Bogan is feeling frustrated, as I imagine he is, he may take it out on her."

"I know that. But I didn't know what else I could do, and anyway she shouldn't have— Well, I don't know."

Dick lay back on the couch again and stared up at the ceiling. Dick seemed to think he had done wrong, and he felt unhappy and confused.

"I didn't know what else I could do," he said again. He looked out the window at the fog. "I just did what I thought was the right thing."

"I congratulate you for knowing what the right thing was. And for doing it."

He bit his lip. Then he said, "Dick, I'm so goddam sorry



about telling Bill Gregory about you and— I mean—”

“Are you?” Dick said, and gave him a long cold look. “There are some other things you could be sorry about too, such as acting like a jackass about your mother. And this silly talk about running off with Mary-Lynn.”

“Listen—” He started to get up.

“You listen. I want to tell you a story. Saturday night after you and Mary-Lynn left I was sitting on my porch looking at the stars and thinking complicated thoughts. Bea Gregory was driving past, and she stopped, seeing me there. She came inside and we talked for a little while—possibly five minutes. It was something she had never done before. She happened to be driving around town that time of night because her husband wasn’t home and she’d gotten restless waiting up for him. I happened to be on the porch because I was worried about you and Mary-Lynn—and because I thought you might come back. You did come back, to see Bea leaving, and drew logical but false conclusions. Which you hurled at Bill Gregory the next day, I’m sure with great provocation—”

“I’m sorry, Dick,” he said hoarsely.

“I know you are, but I want you to see how everything meshes, the terrific interconnection. After your words to Bill, as you know, he went home and beat up on his wife, who came here—for the second time—because she was hurt and terrified and didn’t know where else to go. I don’t excuse my own stupidity in this, but she was in some pain so I put her in my bed and gave her a couple of nembutals. So when I decided I’d better get her out and down to the hotel she was too doped up. When I went in again she was crying bitterly and I tried to comfort her—and went to sleep on the bed beside her. Which was a lucky break for Bill Gregory, because I was there when he and a private detective with a flash camera broke in and—”

“No!” he yelled. “He didn’t do that! He—” He slapped his hands over his mouth, pulling down on the flesh until it felt as though it would tear.

“And ripped her slip away for that sexy look that’s *de rigueur* on paperback covers,” Dick went on. “And kicked me in the

balls when I tried to get the camera away. And of course, here I am, a fairly brawny individual, with my bar bells, but I have the flaw of waking in a state of utter stupor."

"The sonovabitch," he whispered. "Oh, the dirty sonovabitch! Oh, the goddam dirty—" He was crying with shame and guilt and fury, and he knew it was he who had done this almost more than Bill Gregory. More! "Goddam him. Oh, damn him." He mopped fiercely at his eyes.

"The pictures to be used to get the boy away from Bea," Dick went on calmly. And I think that Bea thinks—and maybe correctly—that he doesn't mean to use them in court, but to make her capitulate before it even gets to court. The threat of showing them to Billy some day, and the way it would make Bill feel about her."

"I'll kill him," he whispered, and it was all there was to do.

"Yes it's understandable, isn't it?" Dick said in the same calm voice. "That boy is the most precious thing in the world to Bea. But she had already taken away from Bill—or so he feels—his most precious thing. His certainty of himself, of his manhood, of the superiority of his masculinity over all others, his—"

"Crap!" he cried. "Crap, that bastard! You know goddam well he's been sleeping around with every—well, with my mother for one. And you know there's a lot of others too. He's the kind—"

"Stop it," Dick said. "Hate and fear—it's catching. You'd better try to understand him. You'd better—"

"I understand that sonovabitch," he said through his teeth, through his clenched jaw.

"You don't understand him. How could you be expected to understand him, or what made him? Why he has to hate and strive to surpass whoever has a more expensive Cadillac and the rest of it? Hate and fear anyone with less—the mighty stretch of fear that they—and now They become grouped and tagged in a generality of fear as Reds—might take his things away from him. As I seem to be trying to take his wife away from him. And his wife his son."

He saw Dick dimly and distortedly, like the houses on the boardwalk through the fog this morning when he had walked along the beach. "Goddam him," he said, and he hated Bill Gregory until his head felt as though it would burst from it.

"Yet he likes you," Dick said. "Bea told me once he thought you were the finest boy he knew."

"Sure! Sure he would! Look at all the keen Bill Gregory-type things I've—" He stopped, thinking suddenly of seeing Mary-Lynn again, after she had talked to her uncle; he almost groaned. All the keen things he'd done. The fat-faced man at Bill Gregory's house must have been the private detective. He said, "I went down to his house this morning to tell him I was lying about you and Mrs. Gregory, but he wasn't there. But I guess it was too late anyway."

Dick gave him another long look, not so cold this time. "Yes," he said. "No, it wouldn't have done any good, Keith."

The phone rang, and with a rapid movement Dick was on his feet and bending over it. "Oh, hello, Hattie. Yes, he's here now."

He got up and went outside while Dick talked to Hattie. He tried not to listen. He was thinking about Bill Gregory and Mrs. Gregory and Billy and Mary-Lynn and Mr. Bogan, and it was all on his shoulders like some huge dead weight he could neither move with nor shake off.

Dick came out on the porch. He had his pipe in his mouth.

"Say, Dick, could I go to work today? If you've got anything for me to do down there."

"All right," Dick said.

"I've got to call Mary-Lynn sometime—she's down in La Jolla shopping or something, but I could call her at lunchtime. I've got to tell her about seeing her uncle and all—all that."

Dick nodded. He held a match over his pipe and puffed away. Squinting up at him through the smoke, Dick said, "That was your mother."

He nodded.

"Mrs. Gregory's down at her house. She'll be staying there awhile."

"Oh," he said. Hattie hadn't gone to work today. He licked his lips.

"I think I'll go down there tonight. After dinner. I thought you might want to go with me."

Sure, he thought; sure, he would. He turned away. He didn't want Dick to see his face right now. He stuck his hands deep into the pockets of his slacks and jingled the change, looking around at the sound of a car coming up the hill, fast, saw the fog lights glowing yellow, saw the car—it was Bill Gregory's Cadillac with the top down and the windshield wipers going. It braked to a stop, and Bill Gregory got out and slammed the door and started for the porch.

Bill Gregory stopped about ten feet away with his legs in chocolate-brown slacks planted wide apart, his fists braced on his hips. He was wearing a plaid sports coat with the collar of his sports shirt spread out over the lapels. Bill Gregory looked from one to the other of them.

"Bea in there?"

Dick said, "No, she isn't, Bill." Dick stood there easily, his pipe stuck in his mouth. He, Keith, gazed at Bill Gregory with a kind of wonder—a guy who would beat up on his wife and get a guy to take pictures of her in bed with somebody so he could show the pictures to his son so Billy would hate his mother. It was the sort of thing you might think of doing when in your imagination you thought of somebody doing something really dirty to you and figured out something even dirtier you would do back to them, to fix them—but knew you would never really do anything like it. Bill Gregory had probably come up here to take a swat at Dick, which was just silly because Dick could break Bill's ass for him if he wanted to. A real man, he said to himself, a big man; he stared at Bill Gregory's face, at the reddish hairs curling in the open neck of his sports shirt, at the coat, the chocolate-coloured slacks, up at his face again.

"What did you want, Bill?" Dick asked.

"Where is she? I've got something to tell her."

"I don't imagine she wants to see you right now."

"Huh!" Bill said, and his gold-rimmed tooth showed as he grinned. But it was not much of a grin. "Well, tell her something for me," he said. "She was down at the house earlier trying to get Billy away. Tell her I've got a court order now, and if she tries it again I'll sling her can in jail. Tell her that."

Dick didn't say anything. One of Dick's hands was behind his back, the fist clenching and relaxing, and the mouse of muscle tensed at the side of Dick's jaw—and suddenly he knew that despite all Dick had said to him earlier, Dick hated Bill Gregory as much as he did.

"Huh!" Bill Gregory said again triumphantly. But he seemed pretty nervous. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other ; he slapped his hands together.

"Got some nice pictures, Bannerman. Nice! Thinking about peddling them down in Tijuana. How did you like it last night, Bannerman? How—"

"I was very deeply ashamed," Dick said.

"Huh!" Bill Gregory said. He sounded short of breath. "Ashamed!" he said uncertainly.

"Ashamed for the human race," Dick said.

Bill Gregory's mouth twisted, as though he weren't sure whether that was a joke he ought to laugh at or an insult he ought to get mad about.

Bill Gregory looked at him suddenly, grinned again. "Well, how's your mother, big boy?"

"Just fine," he said.

Bill Gregory grunted, swung around and got back into the Cad. He picked up something from the seat and held it up—a large brown-paper envelope. Then he boomed off up the hill ; the sound of the motor racing was audible for a long time after the Cadillac had disappeared in the fog.

He moved down off the porch away from Dick. He didn't want to make any comment about it. Except he wanted Dick to know he felt he had acted damn fine with Bill Gregory. He said, "Pretty sad-type guy, isn't he?"

"Very sad," Dick said and sounded preoccupied.

"Well, I guess I'd better go get on some old clothes and get

to digging ditches, hadn't I?"

"You'd better put on some old clothes."

"Well, I'll see you down at the job." He got into the convertible and drove off down the hill. He looked back once. Dick was still standing on the porch, his pipe in his mouth, staring up the street at the fog into which Bill Gregory's Cadillac had disappeared.

## Monday 4

BILL ran the Cad into the driveway, got out, and hurried into the house. The private detective, Wilcox, was sitting on his butt in the contour chair, reading one of Billy's comic books. Billy wasn't in sight.

"Where's the boy?" he demanded and pulled the front door shut behind him.

Wilcox dropped the comic book and got to his feet. "He's out there with his swing and stuff, Mr. Gregory."

"I told you to keep an eye on him!" He ran into the kitchen, where he could see the play yard through the window. Billy was in the sandbox. He blew out his breath in a sigh of relief. But Billy ought to have a sweater on in this fog.

Wilcox came up beside him, his fat mole-spotted face worried. "I've been keeping an eye on him, Mr. Gregory. I get up and look out the window all the time. He was tired of playing in here."

"She been back again?"

"No, sir. I've been watching all the time."

He knew damn well Bea had been up at Bannerman's just now. And Bannerman had probably brought her down earlier to try to sneak Billy away. Bitch! He should have cracked Bannerman one, just for— He thought of the way Keith had looked

at him, as though he were some sort of a bug. Bea and Bannerman had probably told Keith a bunch of goddam lies about him; what the hell had Keith been doing up there anyway? Ashamed, Bannerman had said; ashamed of the human race. Two-bit, wife-diddling, rat-nose contractor. Bea was up there, all right. He watched Billy running a toy car along the edge of the sandbox.

"Go down to his room and get a sweater and put it on him," he said to Wilcox. "What do you want him to do, catch pneumonia?" He had a flashing view of Billy gasping for breath in an oxygen tent. "Hurry up!"

Wilcox said, "Yes, sir," and went.

He got a bottle of beer from the refrigerator. Sucking on it, he went out to the car and took from the glove compartment the photographs and the court order, each in a large brown envelope. He went inside again, sat down in the contour chair, and looked at the four photographs. He had had them blown up to eight-by-tens. He studied them one by one, wondering what to make of the fact that Bea hadn't even stripped all the way down for Bannerman. He looked at her breast, which showed in the one picture through her torn slip, and forced himself to laugh out loud. She wasn't going to show her body to anybody, was she? He had been surprised and strangely shocked not to find her naked, or at least in some sexy nightgown, and he congratulated himself on the presence of mind he had shown in ripping off her slip. But Bannerman had had his clothes on; that wasn't so good. He thought of Keith looking at him just now.

Wilcox slouched back inside and came to look over his shoulder at the photographs.

"Get away!"

Wilcox retreated. "Sorry."

He slid the photographs back in their envelope. "I'm going to take him into town now," he said. "We'll be gone the rest of the day probably. You hold it down here. If she comes back throw her out. And while you're sitting around get all her clothes together and put them out in the garage. There are boxes out

in the garage. Call up the Good Will or the Salvation Army to come get them." He tilted his bottle and drank and wiped his mouth, tilted it again and drained it. He got to his feet.

"Put them all out in the garage," Wilcox said and nodded as though he'd been pretty smart to figure it out so quick.

"Don't mess with any jewellery or fur coats. There's a mink around somewhere that's worth something. Or maybe it's downtown in storage."

"Mink," Wilcox said and laughed nervously.

He turned to face Wilcox squarely, feeling his fists tighten at his sides. "You think you're being funny? You stupid sonova-bitch!"

"Sorry," Wilcox said and backed away. "Okay," he said. "I'll take care of everything while you're gone."

He took the photographs and the court order, went out, and locked them in the glove compartment of the Cad again, then went around the house to the sandbox. It was cold and damp in the fog sweeping in off the ocean. Billy glanced toward him, holding up a little red car.

He sat down on the edge of the sandbox beside Billy and brushed a hand over Billy's crew-cut hair. Billy ducked his head away, looking up at him like some kind of half-tame animal. "We're going into town now," he said. "You want to go into town with me? I thought we'd drive around and look at my lots. Want to do that?"

"All right," Billy said.

"And there's a nice lady down there I want to see."

Bill looked at him with his dark, almost pupil-less eyes and frowned. "Ddd-daddy, where did Mommy ggg-go?"

"She went away for a little while."

"When she's coming back?"

"Pretty soon probably."

"When we get bbbbbb-back?"

"Maybe," he said and felt impatience and anger rising in him. But he had to go easy on this. "Maybe she will," he said. "Let's get going. Do you want to go to the potty first?"

"I ddd-did."



He wondered helplessly if Billy had. Sometimes Billy would lie about it, and sometimes he'd keep quiet about it too long and finally wet his pants. Then he, Bill, would get mad, and Bea— Well, Bea didn't matter any more, and he wouldn't make a fuss about it now, or later, if Billy was lying.

"When's Mrs. Haver coming bbb-back, Ddd-daddy?"

"I don't know. Come on, let's get going." He got up, and Billy rose too and began collecting the little metal, plastic and rubber cars.

"What're you doing?"

"I have to ttt-take some cars."

"You don't want to take those cars. They'll just get lost. Come on, come on!"

"I have to take my cars!" Billy wailed.

"Oh, for Jesus Christ's sake!" he said through his teeth and snatched up some of the cars and stuffed them into his coat pocket. He took Billy's hand and pulled him along to the car, helped him in, started the car and backed out of the driveway. Billy stood upright on the seat as he drove, sniffing and wiping at his nose with the sleeve of his sweater. Billy looked at him from time to time out of the corners of his eyes.

Finally Billy whispered, "Where did Mommy go?"

"She went to see some people," he said with difficulty. He put his arm around Billy and hugged him against him, wishing he hadn't been so impatient about the cars. He had to take it easy with Billy. It was going to be hard, he knew that. But he had to be real easy about it. Feeling the thin warm body against his own, he felt his heart suddenly turn over. His son. Well, they'd do all right. He thought of Billy running down into the water like that. Billy was better off with that bitch gone, but he had to be really patient, really gentle, till Billy got used to it.

"Will she bbb-be bbb-back whwhwh—"

"Maybe," he interrupted. "We'll see. Look at the speedometer, kid. Can you tell how fast we're going?"

He drove downtown to the State Street lot and introduced Billy to the manager and the salesman. They made a fuss over him and over his toy cars, which he showed them shyly. Then

he took Billy up to the radio station, where there were a lot more people to meet, and Billy hung on to his leg, hiding his face and not saying anything to anybody. But it was good for him. He drove Billy around to a couple more lots, and one of the salesmen gave Billy a paper bag to carry his cars in. He bought Billy a hamburger and a glass of milk for lunch and got him to a can, where it took Billy a long time to do his duty. Finally he did it, but now Billy was looking tired and beginning to ask about Bea again, so he drove to Ardath's place. He felt wound up tight as he rang Ardath's bell.

Billy's hand clutched his damply. "Who lives here, Ddd-daddy?"

"A nice lady," he said as Ardath opened the door. She had her hair up and wore a flowered blue and white house dress. She looked fine.

"Hello!" Ardath said. "Well, this must be Billy! What a big boy!" She leaned down close to Billy. "My name is Ardath," she said.

Billy hid behind his legs. He pulled Bill out from behind him. "Can't you say 'Hello Ardath,' kid?"

Billy didn't even try.

"Will you and your Daddy come in?" Ardath said, and she sounded too damn sweet. He led Billy into the living room. Billy clutched the paper sack full of cars. Billy glanced around the room furtively, his face screwed up. Don't cry, he thought ; please don't cry.

He hoped Ardath would handle this right, and knew she couldn't. She didn't like kids. They had agreed about that many times, when he had been sore at Bea for being wrapped up in Billy until it came out of her ears.

He sat down and said, "How about showing Ardath your cars?"

Billy opened the sack and took out a yellow car and offered it to Ardath, who exclaimed over it. Billy put the car back in the bag and gave him an anguished glance.

"He looks just like you, Bill," Ardath said.

He nodded. He had heard that twenty times this morning.

Out the window he could see the fog breaking up over San Diego. It would still be foggy in Mardios Beach, which was nearer the ocean ; it would be very thick along the ocean. What now? What the hell now? Billy stood there in the middle of the floor, holding the crumpled sack.

"Do you want to take a little nap, kid?" he said.

Billy shook his head. Now he was crying ; he cried silently, the tears trickling brightly down his cheeks. He mopped at them with the sleeve of his sweater, his lips moving.

He strained to hear what Billy was saying. "I want to go home. I want my Mommy. I want to go home. I want my Mommy." Billy said more loudly, "Ddd-daddy, I want to ggg-go home!"

Ardath was trying to smile, but she looked like she'd bitten into a lemon. "He's just pooped," he said to Ardath. "I dragged him around to all the lots this morning." He got up and took Billy's hand. "Come on," he said gently. "We'll go in and take a little nap and then we'll feel better."

As he moved with Billy toward the bedroom he heard the whispered words, spoken so softly he knew they were not meant to be heard: "I want to go home. I want to go home."

He put Billy in Ardath's bed and covered him up and drew the blinds. Billy kept his head turned away. He stood staring down at Billy, and suddenly it was unfitting and horrible for Billy to be taking a nap in Ardath's big bed, somehow like giving a baby blown-up condoms to play with for balloons. "You just take a little nap, son," he said. "I'll be right out here."

He went out and started to close the door, but Billy yelled, "I want my Mommy!"

He swung around and rushed back, his hand raised, not to hit Billy but only to motion him to be quiet, and saw Billy flinch back and saw the fear. He sat down on the edge of the bed. His voice shook as he said, "Listen, son. You just go to sleep. Don't cry any more. Please don't cry any more. You be a big boy and take a nap, and then we'll go home and coast down the hill in your car. Don't cry any more, will you?"

"Will my Mmm-mommy be there?" Billy whispered, looking

at him with wet eyes and wanting to know pretty bad, and trusting him.

"Sure," he said. "Sure she will." He tried to grin reassuringly and patted Billy's shoulder; he went out and closed the door, and this time there was silence. Ardath was sitting with her feet propped up on the footstool. She got up and kissed him.

"You need a drink, Billy."

Don't call me Billy, he thought, and closed his eyes for a moment. "Yeah, I need a drink," he said. He slumped down in the basket chair and thought, it'll be all right, it'll be all right after he gets used to it, after— He rubbed his hands up and down over his forehead, over his eyes. Ardath came back and put a drink in his hand and sat on his lap.

"He's an awfully cute little boy, Bill," she said. She was heavy on his lap, the pressure on his thighs unpleasant. She was smiling down at him.

"Yeah," he said.

"Smitty called."

"Yeah?"

"He said if I saw you to tell you to be careful about coming here in case your wife's got a detective."

He nodded. "Do you like him, honey?"

"Who?" she asked with a puzzled frown. "Smitty? Why, of course I—"

"Billy. Billy!"

"Oh, I think he's a lamb. He's awfully shy, isn't he? He does look like you a little."

He took a long drink. He put his arm around her, his hand over her breast, and thought of the photograph of Bea, with Bannerman beside her. Ardath leaned back against him and gazed out the window, smiling a set and secret smile.

He felt like Billy, practising what he had to say. When he said it it didn't sound like his voice. "Do you want to get married, honey?"

She was silent for a long time, smiling like that, looking out the window, and he knew she had known he was going to ask her. Finally she said, "You don't have to marry me, darling."

in her phony, too sweet voice. "I don't need that so long as I know you love me. Because you know I love you so, don't you? I'm so happy just the way we are, Bill! And you know, I don't think you ought to be married. I think a wife would just hold you back." She squirmed in his lap and pressed her cheek against his. "You're so sweet," she whispered.

"Get off my lap, will you? I'm getting squashed."

She laughed and got off and pulled up the footstool and sat down on it. She smiled at him, and her eyes were at the same time misty and completely cold, like spray on ice. She was leaning forward toward him so that he could see down her dress to her navel, down between the wonderful great smooth breasts, and he tried desperately not to think of what he saw in her eyes but only of what he saw there, and wished he could crawl in there, snuggle in between them, shrink somehow and huddle up so that he was surrounded by those breasts and could sleep there and forget it all—everything. But Billy was in the bedroom.

He said, "As soon as this hassle with Bea gets finished, let's get married, uh? You and me, hon. I mean it."

"But Bill, I love it the way it is. I love it just like this. Both of us so free."

"We're going to get married," he said tightly. "I've got to have somebody to watch out for that boy. Not just a damn maid."

"I wouldn't be any good at it, Billy."

"Don't call me Billy," he said and managed to keep his voice level. "That's his name." He avoided her cold eyes and tried again. "We're getting married. Now, listen—"

"Bill, it's so wonderful that you'd ask me!" Ardath said. She caught his hands in hers. He looked down at her white smooth fingers that had never done any work, at the blood-red nails, and felt everything shrivel inside himself. "But can't you understand, dear?" she said. Her voice was thick and throaty, like the pigeons cooing on the ledge outside his office in the bank building. "I love everything just the way it is. I don't want it any different. If it was any different it might be spoiled. And

you know I'd just be *destroyed* if it were ever spoiled, darling."

Destroyed like hell, he thought. Let's just go along the way we are, Hattie had said. He could almost laugh at himself. He remembered what Hattie had said about Ardath and cursed her to himself, and cursed Ardath, and Bea, who had caused all this—and thought of Billy, who hadn't liked Ardath. Damn you, Hat, he thought. Now he had to put it to Ardath before she put it, even hinted it to him, or too much would be lost.

"What I had in mind," he said and stopped and took a drink. "The way we'd do it—we'd be business like. We're not a couple of kids any more, are we, honey? He grinned at her and squeezed her hands. "I'd settle a hunk of cash on you that would be all yours, and you'd have an allowance too. Say, a thousand a month, something like that. And someone to keep house and take care of Billy; probably ought to have a couple now. We'd handle the whole thing like it was a business deal and—"

Ardath pulled her hands away. She looked hurt, "I wouldn't like that at all, Bill. That would—"

He held up his hand. "No, that's the way I want to do it, hon. Be practical about it. Work it all out beforehand. It'd be a lot of fun." He managed to laugh, and felt toward himself as he had toward Billy when he had told Billy that Bea would be there when they got home.

"I do love you so, Bill," Ardath said, cooing at him, and laid her head against his arm. He looked down at the dark line in the part of her bleached hair.

"Sure, and you know how I feel about you too, hon," he said. "But we'd make it all a deal, just for fun, uh?"

"If that's the way you want it, darling."

"That's the way I want it. How about making another drink? We'll drink on it."

He watched her sway out to the kitchen with his glass. That goddam walk—like she'd figured out some way to saw wood with her hips while she was moving around. Practical—something practical like sawing wood. Mrs. William Gregory. He heard from the bedroom the low steady sound of Billy crying.

He sat listening to it and felt like a cardboard box floating slowly in with the tide toward where the waves were breaking.

Ardath came back with his drink and whispered, "Is that, Billy crying?"

"Listen," he whispered. "Why don't you go in and tell him it's all right? Tell him a story or something, that's what Bea—You go on in, will you, hon?"

She smiled at him and tiptoed toward the bedroom door. Even tiptoeing she managed to walk that way.

"No," he said. "Wait." She turned back, and he got to his feet. "I guess I'd better go in," he said. "Since he doesn't know you very well yet, I'd better go in."

He went in to tell Billy it was all right, everything was going to be all right.

## Monday 5

MARY-LYNN glanced out the window. It was dark outside, and dinner was over, and as soon as she was packed they were taking her home. She sat in Jeanne's room on what had been her bed, thinking of her own room in her own house in San Diego, where there was always the heavy rumble of trucks and traffic past the corner on University Avenue, where it was hot in the summer until late at night, and out the window were the scaly branches of the pepper tree—the room always smelling, in the heat, of the sickly sweet, pungent odour of the pepper tree—and on the windows the gay chintz drapes she had bought with her baby-sitting money, which only made the room look shabbier.

Like a prison, she thought. That was what it was like, a prison. She saw herself sitting like this in her own room, listening to the slosh and tinkle in the sink as her mother did the

dishes, the rattle of her father reading the paper—he would sit in the living room in his undershirt, barefoot, when it was hot. Then her mother and father bitching at each other. Or her mother coming in to bitch at her about something—there was always something—and her mother going away crying and then her father coming in and trying to be stern, talking in a loud voice because he was embarrassed and going away with threats, defeated. Then finally, with her door locked, she could cry, quietly, so no one could hear her.

She wasn't going to cry now. She had packed Jeanne's shorts and halter, and she flipped one of her sweaters over to cover them. She had also packed the new dress. For a while she had actually hoped they would try to take it away from her, savouring the picture of herself flying into a rage and destroying the dress before their eyes. But she didn't want to destroy it, even as a gesture, and it was packed at the very bottom of her suitcase. She wondered if Keith's mother had recognized it.

The thought of Mrs. Rankin stirred her to anger. There had been so many things today. Keith's mother lying to her like that. Keith's betrayal. That stupid jerk at the liquor store. Her uncle's rage, her aunt's coldness, Jeanne feeling sorry for her. But out of it all she had formulated clearly and irrevocably her philosophy. She would not cry. She was only scornful of them, and she would beat them all. They oppressed her, persecuted her, betrayed, cheated, or sought to cheat her at every turn, tried to keep her down, make her into a crummy little nonentity of a typist in some crummy old building in San Diego. But in so doing they had disclosed how they feared her, and she felt more confidence now than she had ever felt.

But as soon as her bag was packed Uncle Douglas was going to drive her home to Forty-third Street in San Diego, and she knew she wasn't going to be able to go back to college in the fall. She sucked back the tears.

Jeanne came in and stopped apprehensively just inside the door. "Daddy said to ask you if you're almost ready."

"Almost," she said. "I guess I could throw everything in every which way, if he wants me to."



"Oh no," Jeanne said. "Gee, I'm sorry, Mary," she whispered. "I don't know why he's acting like this."

"I don't care."

"I'm sorry you have to—you're going home." Jeanne sat down on the bed opposite her. Tears showed in her eyes. "Damn it all," she said.

"Well, I don't care. Maybe it's all right up here when it's sunny, but when it's foggy you can't even go to the beach."

"Yeah, it's awfully dead," Jeanne said and hugged her knees up against her chest.

"Besides, there aren't any men up here," she said. "I mean, there's only Keith, and he's awfully young. I guess it's all right for you, if you don't mind just sitting around the house watching TV."

Jeanne nodded and looked hurt. "I *tried* to tell Daddy it wasn't your fault," she whispered. "I don't see why he thinks you lied to him, except that about that bottle of liquor. But he's awfully mad. He—"

"Well, I'm going to pay him back for his old bottle." She was not! "He doesn't have to worry about that."

Jeanne didn't say anything, rubbing her eyes.

"Well, I can sure see why you never go out," she went on. "If you just went out and had a Coke with somebody and were gone five minutes they'd think you'd been on a really horrible mad make out."

"Maybe I can come down to San Diego to see you next week," Jeanne said. "We could—"

"Oh, don't bother," she said and rose and went to get her things from the bathroom. She heard the phone ringing. A moment later Cora appeared, fat and sloppy-looking in shorts and a white middy blouse.

"It's for you, Mary," Cora whispered. She looked scared. "I think it's—you know."

"Well, you'd better run and tell your father, hadn't you?" She looked from Cora to Jeanne, neither of whom looked back at her, forced a yawn, and patted it as she went out. But she felt very tense. Keith had called an hour ago, when they were

at dinner, and Uncle Douglas had told Lillian to tell Keith that Mary-Lynn couldn't talk to him. That damn black snotty Lillian! She wondered if they would try to stop her from talking to Keith now. Let them try! She ignored them as she walked through the living room to the phone, which was around the corner in the entryway.

"Hey," Keith said, "I've been trying to get you all day."

"I've been packing. I'm going home."

The line was silent for a moment. She heard Keith clear his throat. "I'm sorry, Mary-Lynn," he said humbly. "I guess I fouled everything up royally. But I couldn't let Dick get in trouble. After all, we went over there and—"

"But you—" she interrupted, then stopped. She wasn't going to get into a fight with him now. She stared into the black mouthpiece and tried to see the future in it, saw a segment of it, shallowly, which was enough, and did not let herself look farther. She almost laughed aloud as she glanced over her shoulder at the archway to the living room. She wondered if one of them had sneaked into the master bedroom to listen on the extension there. Well, they could go to hell if they had.

"I tried to call you this morning," Keith said. "But you weren't there. I couldn't later, I was working today."

"Working?"

"For Dick. Digging ditches and carrying stuff around. Listen, your uncle said I couldn't see you any more."

"He can drop dead," she said. She gripped the phone tighter. "Listen, do you want to drive me down to San Diego tonight?"

"Now? Well, I've got to—" He paused. "Well, sure, Mary-Lynn."

"I'll have to sneak out. Meet me down at the corner in ten minutes, will you, darling?"

She glanced toward the living room again. "Keith," she said, "have you seen your mother today?"

"No. But I was going to— No, I haven't."

"Know what I heard? Somebody said she was going broke. That she was going to have to sell her shops and—"

Keith laughed. "Nuts! Who told you that?"

"Oh, I just heard it." She took a deep breath. She whispered, "I'd better get going. Meet me down at the corner in ten minutes."

"Check."

But she couldn't let him go yet. "It's important," she said.

"I'll be there. Mary-Lynn, I love you. Even if I did foul you up."

There it was. "I love you," she whispered. "Darling," she whispered, "maybe we won't go to San Diego. Maybe we'll go somewhere else." Quickly she hung up.

Uncle Douglas looked up from the paper as she went back into the living room. He had a suit and tie on. He glared at her with his jaw stuck out. *Goddam you*, she thought. He'd had to go sneaking around to the liquor store to see if Keith had bought any liquor down there, and the liquor-store man had had to blabbermouth. "Aren't you just about ready, young lady?" Uncle Douglas said. Aunt Grace looked up from her book, smiled frigidly, looked down again.

"Just about," she said.

"Was that Keith Rankin on the phone?"

"Yes."

"Don't think I'm not going to warn your mother about that boy."

She shrugged and went down the hall to Jeanne's bedroom. Cora and Jeanne were still there, both sitting on Jeanne's bed. "I want to talk to Jeanne alone," she said to Cora, who whined around until Jeanne slapped her, then left, crying.

She told Jeanne she was going to elope with Keith. She had to tell someone.

Jeanne stared at her with frightened, admiring eyes. "Where're you going?" Jeanne whispered.

"Las Vegas." It was hard to speak casually. She was shivering. What if they didn't go now, after she had told Jeanne? But someone had to know she was going. Someone had to care.

"Oh, *marvellous!*" Jeanne whispered. "It's simply *marvellous* over there. You ought to stay at the Desert Inn. We stayed there once. It's just terrific!"

She leaned over the dresser and watched her face as she applied lipstick. Her hand was a little shaky, but her face showed nothing. She didn't look scared at all. She felt very proud and sure of herself. She said, "Oh, I guess we can't stay any place like that. I don't have anything to wear at a place like that." She glanced quickly at Jeanne's reflection in the mirror.

"Your new dress—" Jeanne began.

"You know that's not dressy enough. You've been there, you ought to know."

Jeanne lent her her best black dress, black suede shoes and bag, and white gloves. The dress wasn't very high-styled, but it was all right. She felt no compunction about taking it, as she felt none about the shorts and halter, and, least of all, about the dress they had bought for her. Because none of them had been given her or lent her, really. She had won them. She changed into the black dress, and, with Jeanne carrying her suitcase, they crept down the hall and through the dark kitchen to the back door. The light was on in Lillian's room. On the back porch, in the darkness, she took the suitcase from Jeanne.

"Good-bye, Mary," Jeanne whispered emotionally. "Gee, all the luck in the world, and I hope you'll be wonderfully happy. I think it's just wonderful." Jeanne put her arms around her, but she twisted away.

"Don't wreck my lipstick," she said, but she pressed Jeanne's hand with her gloved hand, feeling a small gratitude because Jeanne loved her and wanted her to be happy and would keep her mouth shut for long enough. With the suitcase rubbing against her leg, shivering, she moved down the walk, keeping to the ditch between the flagstones to muffle her footsteps. At the sidewalk she looked back. She could just make out Jeanne's figure standing outside the back door. Jeanne must be awfully jealous.

Keith's convertible was waiting at the corner. He jumped out when he saw her, tossed her suitcase into the back set, helped her in. "Hurry!" she said.

He was silent as he started down the hill. "Say, I found my

pin in the car," he said finally.

"Did you?"

"The clasp's broken."

She didn't answer, and he fell silent again. She gripped her hands so tightly together that the knuckles ached.

Keith said, "What did you mean just before you hung up?"

"What did you think I meant?"

He was driving slowly. The street came toward them in the darkness, brightened whitely under the headlights, trees swept toward them and arched over their heads and fell away behind. Keith turned down California Street toward the highway.

"I told you I'd think it over," she said. "I want to, I think. Tonight."

He said slowly, "It's not just because—"

"No."

He was silent again, and she knew he wanted to crump out, but it didn't frighten her. "Oh, now *you* don't want to," she said.

"Sure I do. Hey, are we really going, Mary-Lynn?" But he said it without enthusiasm.

"If you still want to."

"Well, hell, yes! But—you mean right now?"

She wasn't going to say anything more. She knew he would go. She was crying; the tears jipped out of her eyes without sensation.

"Okay," Keith said. Then he said huskily, "I think we'll have something pretty good though." She turned her face away, letting him talk himself into it now. "Won't we?" he said. "We'll make a real good thing of it, won't we?" He touched her arm as he stopped for the red light at the highway. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wasn't trying to tread water or anything. But—well, are you sure you want to go like this? I mean, take off right now and—"

"I said I'd go if you still want to." She heard the clang of the signal, watched the light switch from red to green. Two cars slowed to a stop on the highway, two more behind them, one on the other side, then a bus, then a big truck and trailer.

"Okay," Keith said and turned to the right at the brightly lit intersection, the straight pipes roaring and crackling behind. She didn't look back. She turned to smile at Keith, but his face was shadowed in the darkness. "I've got to go to the motel and change my clothes and pack a bag," he said. "I won't take long."

"Have you got any money?"

"Sure." He put his hand on the seat between them and she put her hand, in Jeanne's white glove, in it. She moved over and leaned her head against his shoulder. She had better not ask him again about his mother, she thought. But she had known all along that Hattie Rankin was lying. Keith put his arm around her and said shakily that he loved her, and she felt the same small, almost contemptuous gratitude toward him that she had felt toward Jeanne. She didn't love him. Maybe she had loved him yesterday and the day before, but tonight she didn't, nor would she ever. She would never love anyone, she decided, and she was glad of it. She glanced at the hotel as they sped by it. Orange lights played over the sign HOTEL MARDIOS, over the tall palms and the spruces and the clumps of shrubs and the bright fenestration of the façade and the entry-way, where a bellboy lounged. Then the hotel was behind them, and she could see the lights of the houses along the beach, and beside the highway, the lights of the motel where Keith had stayed last night. The wind whipped at her hair.

"I love your car," she said.

"It ought to get us to Yuma in about five hours or so," Keith said in a restrained voice. "Hey, are we really going?"

"I want to go to Las Vegas."

"That's a hell of a way, Mary-Lynn!"

"I want to go to Las Vegas," she said and clenched her hands in her lap again.

"But that's three hundred miles! It'll take—"

"I don't care!" she cried. The complex of fear, impatience, and anger, always so close, crushed down on her again. "I want to go to Las Vegas!" she said. Tears ached and burned in her eyes. "Please," she said. "I've been through Yuma. It's ter-

rible. Dirty little old place and Mexicans and dirty little auto courts. I don't want anything like that ever again. I can't—Please! I don't want to go to that awful old place to get married."

"Yeah, but listen, Mary-Lynn—"

"Please," she said and sobbed, for the effect, and because she was frightened, and because she could never tell him, who was going to be her husband, as she had never been able to tell anyone, how she felt. She couldn't tell him that they had to go to Las Vegas because she was through right now and forever with everything poor and dirty and old and crummy, with poor people like her mother and father and their neighbours and the boys she had gone with at State, with old cars and cheap clothes and shabby old houses, and worrying about everything. "I'm not going to Yuma!" she cried. "I'm not! If that's—"

"Okay," Keith said. "If that's the way you feel about it, Mary-Lynn." He slowed the car and turned into the motel. She waited in the car, shivering, turning the dial to try to find some music on the radio, trying to think of nothing at all, trying not to plan ahead at all—just waiting for Keith to come out so that they could start the long trip to Las Vegas. After they got there, after they were married, everything would be wonderful and nothing would ever be able to hurt her again.

## Monday 6

RICHARD BANNERMAN waited until a few minutes past eight, and then, sitting behind the wheel in the pickup, delayed a little longer before he backed out into the street and started down the hill. So Keith was not going to Hattie's with him, so Keith had changed his mind—if Keith's mind had even been made up.

Probably, to impress Keith, he should have punched Bill Gregory on the nose.

He felt deeply hurt, disappointment, ineffectual, as he drove the pickup truck down California Street and turned on to the highway. With the darkness the fog had lifted slightly, and there was a soft gray fuzziness to everything the headlights touched. The fog muted the signs and the cheap commercial buildings along the highway, and through the fog the varicoloured neon lights were beautiful. The fast through-traffic rushed past him with smeary headlights and ripping sounds of tyres on wet pavement, the cars and trucks and buses slowing only slightly for the thirty-five-mile-an-hour speed-limit sign. He turned off the highway opposite the Catholic church, where the weathered figure of Christ stood, with arms outstretched. Come unto Me.

With the steady rush-rush-rush of the speeding cars behind him, he drove through the dark streets of Mardios Beach. The fog swirled and flowed like liquid smoke. This was his town ; he loved this town. And you could get away from the highway. You could get down to the beach or into the quiet streets up near the crest and only faintly hear the rush of the cars. It was a nice little town, but maybe living in it was like living in a cellophane package. Maybe he should leave here and go to East St. Louis or southwest Chicago and get his head out of the sand.



But if you got your head out of the sand the wind blew the sand in your eyes and you were apt to blame all on the wind. You lived in East St. Louis or Chicago and you blamed the horrors on inequality and the economic and social system. But it was more basic than that, and he knew it. Most basic of all were the human beings and their relations with one another and with the whole which they made up, the way they treated, loved, hated, conflicted or co-operated with one another, and why go to East St. Louis to impress himself with the utter hopelessness of "Forgiveness" and "Understanding" and all the other lovely impossible vagaries? Mardios Beach served as well.

He drove down along Ocean Avenue and listened to the sound of the ocean and smelled the ocean ; he passed Bill Gregory's house, where lights were burning in the living room and the black Cadillac convertible stood in the drive, its shining body and chrome fittings catching little shards of light. Parked beside the porch, in the light from the living-room window, was the toy car, like the cub of the other. He wondered if it had occurred to anyone that Bill Gregory might love that little boy.

When he reached Hattie Rankin's house he parked and moved in the darkness down the walk beside it to the boardwalk, where the front door was. The waves were breaking with crisp fresh sounds along the beach, and he could just make out the faint line of the surf. To the north a pale blurred light marked the end of the pier. He wondered where the seal was.

Through the window he could see Bea Gregory on the couch, propped up by a cushion, wearing a yellow sweater and holding a tall glass in both hands. She looked pale and washed out. He stood on the boardwalk watching her for some time before he knocked, and felt uncomfortably like a suitor as he waited for the door to open.

Hattie was wearing tight, tapered, striped slacks and a yellow shirt. In the light of the room behind her, her tan face was lined; it was the first time he'd seen her look more forty than

thirty. "Glad you stopped by," she said and looked past him, to his left, to his right, and back at him again, and grinned a little. "But I guess you didn't come to see me." She stuck a finger into his ribs like the barrel of a pistol as he entered past her.

"Hello, Richard," Bea said, and he said, "Hello, Bea." Looking at her sitting motionless, hopeless, and patient there on the couch, he felt again the irritation at her for the excess of the very qualities he found attractive in her.

"Highball, Dick?" Hattie asked.

"Let me get it."

"Sit down."

He sat down, and Hattie bustled out into the kitchen, and he was left alone with Bea, which was as Hattie wanted it. "I wish you'd waited for me this morning," he said.

"I thought I'd better go. I—" She stopped, flustered.

"Have you seen Bill?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No." She sat there with her hands in her lap.

Did she see herself as a Christian in the Coliseum with the lions let loose? No, that was unfair to her. Beneath that tired, bruised, colourless face there seemed nothing, as though whatever personality she had was so fragile it had been torn irreparably. But maybe that was unfair too; maybe she was merely, understandably, in a bad state of shock.

"He's got an injunction so I can't see Billy," she said.

"And you've given up?"

"I don't know what to— Hattie says I have to see a lawyer."

"It's a thought," he said and grimaced. There was a rattle and metallic bang in the kitchen as Hattie broke ice cubes loose from a tray. "Yes," he said. "I think you should too, Bea."

The phone rang. "Yes?" he heard Hattie say.

He looked steadily at Bea. "Do you know what I thought? I thought after the initial shock you'd be like a mother bear."

"It wouldn't do any good," Bea said.

"Dick!" Hattie called. She was standing in the kitchen door-

way. There were spots of colour on her cheeks. "Did Keith say anything to you about going anywhere with Mary-Lynn tonight?"

"No."

Hattie nodded and disappeared. Bea sipped her drink, clutching it tightly in both hands. The rims of her nostrils whitened and faded, stiffened and relaxed, as she breathed. Her hair had been brushed until it shone, and he wondered if it had been brushed so carefully for him. "I expect she can take care of herself," he heard Hattie say.

"What will you do now?" he said to Bea. "Go to your parents?"

Bea shook her head; she gave him a weak, embarrassed smile. "My father's dead," she said. "My mother's married again and they live in Florida. I don't think— I guess I'll go back to Los Angeles. I know people there. I suppose I'll just go back there. I hadn't really thought about it, Richard."

He grimaced again at the ridiculous formality of that "Richard." No one had ever called him Richard except his maternal grandmother. And Bill Gregory must by now possess large glossy photographs showing Bea and himself, "Richard," in what would seem to be intense sexual ardour—but instead was shock and fear.

"Well," he heard Hattie say, "call the sheriff then. Don't tell me your troubles. I've got troubles of my own." The receiver of the telephone was slammed down, and Hattie came out of the kitchen and handed him his drink.

Hattie sat down in her easy chair and propped her legs over the arm. "Bogan," she said through her teeth. "He told Keith and that girl they couldn't see each other any more, so naturally they've sneaked out together, and now he's going to call the sheriff."

She had spoken with irony, but her face was drawn and still more deeply lined. He knew, suddenly, that Keith and Mary-Lynn had eloped, and he thought about it with a slowly developing horror. He had never really believed it could happen.

Hattie was watching him, and he hoped she couldn't read

him.

She got to her feet abruptly. "Well, if you'll pardon me I'm going for a little walk. I'm a solitary worrier." With quick hard steps she went to the door and outside. She pulled the door closed behind her.

"Poor Hattie," Bea said and glanced at the window. "She's been so worried."

He wondered why it infuriated him so that she should take time out to feel sorry for anyone else. "You said you were going back to Los Angeles," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Yes. I have friends there, and I can get a job. And I've got a little money of my own from my father's estate. I'll be all right."

"Will you get married again?"

She flushed, and with the deep infusion of colour her face was instantly more attractive. "Why, yes," she said. "I hope so."

"What about Billy?"

The flush faded, and he felt like a sadist. He should, he thought, go sit beside her, tell her he would always be here for her, ask, would she marry him? Caress her. Comfort her.

"You and Hattie think I'm spineless," Bea said almost angrily. "I know you do. But I can't do anything. I really can't. He's got those pictures. I know you thought I was just hysterical last night, but I know Bill. If I don't just back out I'll be told that if I make any fuss about Billy he'll show Billy the pictures. Not now, when they wouldn't mean anything to him, but later, when they would. It would probably be just a threat, but I couldn't—I can't take the chance. Billy's too—he's already too troubled. I can't do that to him. Because of what it would make him think of me. He'd hate me, and he'd hate Bill terribly too, and it might—" She looked at him pleadingly, and he knew she could not give a name to what she was thinking. "Oh," she said, "you know. I can't take a chance of doing anything like that to him, can I?"

"You'd feel it was you doing it, not Bill?"

"Oh yes."

"You mean you don't blame Bill for any of this?"

"Well, it's that I know how Bill is. So I have to act accordingly, don't I? I think I do."

He stared at her.

"Oh, of course I can't help blaming him," she said. She raised her glass to her mouth with both hands, as though it were heavy, but didn't drink. "But then he can't help the way he is," she went on. "Nobody can much, can they? Except the people who *know* the way they are; they can a little, I think. He must have been terribly hurt to find out—think he'd found out—that I'd been sleeping with you." She flushed again, said quickly, "So maybe with a lot of others too. It would hurt terribly. It hurt me to know he went with other women. But of course not anywhere near so much because I'm not a man and I don't have that kind of ego."

He winced at her naïve wisdom.

"Now if he hurts me terribly, then it doesn't hurt him quite so terribly," Bea said. "That's the way it is. The only thing—" Her voice began to tremble. "The only thing is—" She raised her glass again and this time drank from it. He saw that she was holding it tightly to keep her hands from shaking. "The only thing is," she said, "I'm afraid he thinks Billy is more his than mine anyway." Her voice took on a harsh edge; he saw her throat work. "Because of the money," she said. "Because Billy cost a lot of money. Hospital bills and doctors' bills and clothes and shoes and someone to take care of him. Oh, and pills and a special diet we had for a while and the pediatricians and a speech man we went to once. Oh, Bill loves him too," she said defensively, "but he thinks that Billy is more his son because of the money."

Suddenly her face twisted violently, she shook her head violently; he saw the bright tears squeeze out of her eyes. "And he has it all figured out how he wants Billy to be," she cried. "All the things he wants Billy to do, how he wants him to grow up. And I don't want Billy to grow up like him!"

He rose. Feeling very big, thick, awkward, he went to sit beside her on the couch. He wondered if there were anyone anywhere quite like her. He took the glass from her hands and

set it down and took her hands in his. She tried to pull her hands away.

"No," she said. "No, I don't think—" The phone rang, and rang quickly again. "You'd better answer it, Richard," Bea said.

He went into the kitchen and picked up the phone. "Mrs. Rankin?" blasted in his ear.

"No, she's not here at the moment."

"*Damn!* Where is she? Who is this?"

"Richard Bannerman, Mr. Bogan. She's—"

"Well, you can tell her we've just found out from my daughter that my niece has eloped with Keith."

"I'll tell her."

"I suppose you knew it already, Bannerman! I suppose they've been over at your house drinking again. Well, I'm—"

"Where did they go?"

"Las Vegas. Now, see here, Bannerman— Well, you have Mrs. Rankin call me. I've already called Mary-Lynn's mother and father. They intend to have this thing annulled. They—"

"I'll have Mrs. Rankin call you," he said and hung up. He stood looking down at the phone. Failure on failure—he didn't see even yet what he could have done, but saw, dimly through the fog and night, that this was not all either, saw it as though it were an equation, not of digits but of people and actions, mistaken and tragicomic, or rather a set of simultaneous equations with  $x$  equalling—what? He felt only helplessness. He went back into the living room.

"What was it?" Bea said.

"Keith's eloped with his girl. I thought he had more sense. I—" He stopped as Bea got up, small and slim in a tweed skirt and the yellow sweater that was too large for her. She was very small but not so fragile as he had thought. She limped though as she moved toward the door.

"I'd better go find Hattie."

"I'll go," he said. He stepped past her to the door, brushing against her. She looked up at him with her large, solemn, steady eyes in her heart-shaped face, and he felt in her eyes what

he had always felt—the demand—but wondered now if she knew what she was demanding. Outside he shivered in the cool wind off the ocean. When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he saw Hattie leaning on the railing a little way down the boardwalk.

He went down to her. "Bogan just phoned again. They've gone off to Las Vegas to get married."

Hattie stared at him. They started back along the boardwalk together. She said, "I'd just about got it worked out that he wouldn't. And that she wouldn't. What did Bogan say?"

"He wants you to call him." He held the door open for her, and she went in past him. Bea stood watching them. "He talked about having it annulled," he said. "But I don't know what the law is or whether Nevada or California law applies."

Hattie stood with her hands in the pockets of the striped, tight slacks, her face turned aside. "But Keith's under twenty-one. He has to have my consent."

He put his hand on her shoulder and patted it awkwardly. "Hattie—" Bea said.

Hattie looked at her. "I have to decide," Hattie said. "I have to decide whether to have it annulled and—or—" She slapped her hands over her face and shook her head. "What do I *do*?" she cried. She ran across the room and into the hall and disappeared.

"I'd better go talk to her," Bea whispered, gave him the faint uncertain smile, and limped after Hattie. He sat down and finished his drink and listened to the voices in the bedroom: Bill Gregory's women comforting each other. He left to go to the Jacaranda Bar for another drink.

## Monday 7

SITTING in the Jacaranda, alone at the bar, Bill had already drunk four highballs, waiting for someone to come in to talk to, and he knew he was drunk and that he was drinking too much—not just the last few days, but the last weeks and months. He got wound up too tight and then he'd have a drink at night to wind down, except that then he'd have more than one and after a few drinks he'd be drunk. It was a good way to get an ulcer or something wrong with your liver. And smoking too much too, a couple of packs a day; that was the way to get cancer of the lungs or mouth or something. He looked at the cigarette between his darkened fingers and at his half-finished drink. Ernie, who owned the Jacaranda Bar, sat on a stool in the corner behind the counter, reading a comic book. He was short and bald with waxy-looking skin and a flag tattooed on one bare forearm.

"What the hell's that Mex's name?" he said to Ernie.

"I already told you," Ernie said. "Name's Manuel. He's a honest hard-working kid and he did just right. Sometimes I'll serve a minor in here—sure; but Manuel doesn't know who's who and he's got to watch it. He did just right."

"He stinks."

Ernie raised an eyebrow, then looked down at the comic book again. The tattooed flag on his arm rippled.

He stinks, and you stink too, he said to himself and looked around the room. Ernie had a good thing here in this bar. He really pulled them in during the summer season.

Colonel Kinney and Warren Ruel came in together, the Colonel skinny and hunched over, with a bony, fierce face; Warren fat and jolly-looking. Warren slapped him on the back. "Well, how-do, Bill." Kinney nodded to him. "Hello, Gregory."

He wondered if they knew about Bea and Bannerman. He



stared at them for some sign, some flicker or evasion of their eyes, but he couldn't tell.

"Looking for a poker game tonight, Bill?" Warren said, taking the stool beside him. Colonel Kinney sat down on the stool on the other side of Warren.

"Not tonight," he said.

"You look kind of green around the edges. You've been working too hard. You used-car dealers work too hard."

Keith had called him "used-car dealer" as though it was the same as sonovabitch. But Warren hadn't meant anything like that. Warren was a good friend of his, he knew Warren liked him. Besides, Warren was in the wholesale-appliance business in San Diego, and that was the crummiest racket there was. Used-car dealer. He watched Ernie get up to mix highballs for Warren and the Colonel.

"Sure I work too hard," he said to Warren. "Who the hell doesn't?"

"Damned if I do," Warren said and laughed.

"I don't either," Kinney said and shook his head. "Couple of years ago my doctor warned me. You can use up your heart slow, he said, or you can use it up fast. If you want to use it up fast there's not much mileage left in it. That scared me."

"I've got an overdrive," he said. "If you go fast you get further." The old phut; he'd spent his life in some Army post drawing tax money out of the kitty while the sergeants did his work for him. Now he was retired and drawing money just the same while he puttered around the garden and worried himself to death being afraid he was going to die. "I've got overdrive," he said again.

Warren and the Colonel looked at him strangely, and Ernie, who had put their drinks on the bar, was staring at him. Well, he was drunk, so he'd talked too loud, so what the hell? Suddenly he remembered that he had left the photographs of Bea and Bannerman at home in his dresser drawer, and if Bea sneaked in without that stupid Wilcox hearing— But the negatives were downtown in his safe.

He swung toward Kinney. "I wouldn't slow up," he said

"When you slow up you're dead. I'd tell the doctor to hell with it."

"I don't think you would," Kinney said coldly.

"Yeah, I would," he said. He took a long drink. He grinned at them. He wished there were others here now, because he was going to tell them. "Yeah, I would," he said again. I'll tell you why. When I was a kid I figured out that I was going to go a hell of a long way. I did, goddam it, too. I have. You know Tustin? We lived in Tustin. My dad was a bum, he didn't like to work, we had a kind of half-ass little orange grove, and we were as poor as hell. Well, I decided I was going to work, I wasn't going to wait around for my old-age pension to start. I took off out of there for LA, and I hit it right at the start of the depression, and all I could get was a job running an elevator at two bits an hour. Seeing the ups and down of life. I saved every dirty penny. I didn't eat. It took me twenty-three years to get where I am, and I'm not where I'm going to be yet, and last year I paid an income tax that was more money than my dad ever heard of in his life."

He took another long drink. It felt warm going down. He felt warm now and no longer afraid of their knowing about Bea and Bannerman. He watched himself in the rosy mirror behind the bar. "At the beginning you figure how far you think you can go and how far you want to go," he said, squinting at the reflection in the tinted glass. "And then somewhere along the line you figure what it's going to cost you. But you say okay, and you don't back down if you want to get there. You know you're never going to have time to phut around planting roses in your goddam garden, and you know you're going to get kicked in the face a lot, and you know a lot of people're going to hate your guts—and maybe you know you're never really going to get where you want to go. Just part of the way. Who the hell ever gets there anyway? But you've made your deal and you don't back off."

"You know about Faust?" Warren said.

"I don't know about anybody but Bill Gregory. Or care either." He wondered why he was talking to these schmucks.

Warren was a fat lazy toad, either suck-around or snotty, depending on who you were. Army officers were snotty useless bastards, and retired ones ought to be taken out to the dump and burned with the rest of the trash. He thought of Ardath with her expensive tail on his lap pretending it wasn't a business deal, or pretending they were pretending that it was, and the remembrance was like pus in his veins. What the hell did he have, now that he'd worked his ass off for twenty-three years? What the hell was there? Colonel Kinney was looking at him with frigid distaste, Ernie was reading his comic book again, Warren was frowning, plucking at his second or third chin.

"You've got to be honest with yourself," he said loudly. "That's all. Well, I've been honest. I picked where I wanted to go and I'm going to try to get there. I'm not going to back off just because it looks tough." He put his hands down on the bar in front of him, the fingers stretched and spread. Ten fingers. It was as clear as that. There were ten fingers, his ten fingers. That and your head was what you had to work with, and it was just a matter of how hard you wanted to work them. What was it he had wanted, still wanted, always wanted? The ten fingers blurred and meshed together in his eyes. But he'd worked so damn hard.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he said. "Do it just the same way, if I had to do it over. All the bust-ass long-day long-week work—I'd do it all over. To get where—"

"Take it easy, Bill," Warren said in a worried voice.

"Take it easy," he said contemptuously. He didn't look at Warren, who was not his friend. He didn't have any friends. There weren't any friends, only people who worked for you or wanted something off you. There was his wife, Bea, who hated him. There was Ardath—no, she was one of the ones who worked for him. There were his brothers, but they worked for him too, and hated him besides, and were jealous. There was Billy.

"You got to be honest with yourself, that's all," he said. "I mean, honest by yourself on what you're going to do. I don't mean the other honest. Like your income tax; you beat it, or

it beats you out of a lot of dough and buys TV sets and big steaks for the lousy bums too lazy to work. That kind of honest just means how the market works. Like we used to put SAE sixty oil in a crankcase to make a motor sound good because everybody else did. Now you sell a hack on time to some sailor, and he can't make the payments or gets hipped out, so you reclaim the car and sell it over fifteen times to fifteen sailors and make three times what it's worth. Just the way you know this customer that wants to take out a flashy Cad for a couple days' free trial has got some big deal cooking and wants to impress his client he can afford a Cad. But—what the hell was I talking about?"

"Why don't you drink up, Bill?" Warren said. "Say, I heard a little joke about a—"

"No," he said. "I was talking about this country. This is a great country, do you know it? Because anybody can get up out of the ditch and go to town. The only thing I don't have any use for is nobody's honest with themselves. This crap that nobody's better than anybody else—that's crap! You're better than the next guy if you work harder and if you get further. And if you've not more to show for it. If you just pee around saying, oh no, everybody's free and equal, you're not being honest. Because you really don't think so."

"Listen, Bill—" Wren began.

"I don't want to hear any of your crummy jokes," he said and slid his glass down the counter toward Ernie. "Reload that, will you, Ernie? No, I don't listen to you because you're not as good as I am—you didn't get as far. You don't even work for yourself. I'll listen to somebody got further than I have, maybe I can learn something. I can't learn anything from you."

Kinney laughed harshly.

He swung around toward Kinney again. "Don't laugh at me," he said. "Don't ever laugh at me, mac."

Ernie stood in front of him, holding his empty glass. "You sure you want another drink?"

"Yeah," he said. He grinned at Ernie. His head felt very heavy, but he could hold it up. "Yeah, I want another," he said,

and Ernie made it for him.

"That's what I told my son," he said, addressing no one in particular, watching his dim pinkish reflection in the mirror behind the bar. "I bought him this toy car, had it made for him. It cost a hundred and forty bucks. It's heavy, and he has a hard time pushing it around. He wants somebody else to push him around, push him up the hill so he can coast down." He laughed and shook his head. "That's what I tell him," he went on. "Nobody's going to push you. Nobody helps you up the hill. You've got to do it all by yourself." Suddenly he was furiously ashamed of himself for talking so much, blatting away three hundred words a minute to these grunt-brains who couldn't understand anything. He wiped away the spit that had collected at the corners of his mouth.

"He's got to learn that's the way it is," he said, and heard the door of the bar open behind him and in the mirror saw Bannerman coming in, wearing a long-sleeved white sports shirt. Everything in his eyes exploded into fiery reds. He sat there watching the red mirror until the colour faded and he saw Bannerman again. Bannerman had his pipe in his mouth.

"Hello, Bannerman," a thick voice said, and he was surprised that he had spoken. "Make the man a drink, Ernie," he said.

"Have one on me, Bannerman," he said.

"Thanks," Bannerman said and sat down on the stool beside him. "Hello, Colonel. Hello, Warren." Bannerman acted as though nothing had happened.

"I was just telling these guys all about it," he said, watching Bannerman in the mirror, watching the brown face that Bea loved. It looked as stiff and blank as a piece of board.

"Were you?" Bannerman said.

"Oh, not about that." He made himself grin. "No, sir, not about that. I wouldn't want them to be ashamed for the human race. I mean about how it all works. How you have to work to get where you want to get."

"I'd like to hear."

"I'll bet you would." He wondered how much Bannerman made a year, building those crummy houses; how old Banner-

man was ; what Bannerman had started from. Bannerman had been to college ; he remembered Bea saying that, and anyway it was obvious—nobody who hadn't been to college would have his hair cut like that. And Bea had said that Bannerman was intelligent when she was diddling around with her Great Books. Probably that was when it had started. Intelligent was a stupid word. He could tell Bannerman a lot of things about Bea. He wondered how long she'd been screwing Bannerman and how many people knew, and everything reddened and was seen as through a film of red liquid again. He said slowly, "What you do, you figure out right at the beginning what you want, then—"

"What do you want?" Bannerman said.

"I know what I want. Anyway, I'm talking about you now. What do you want?"

"I'm not sure."

"Then you're stupid."

"Hey, take it easy, Bill!" Warren said.

"Very probably I am," Bannerman said. "But what do you want, Bill? Just more? Nothing more than more?"

"Huh!" he sneered. "What the hell do you think you mean by that? That's stupid—" Then he caught what Bannerman meant, and it shook him, as though somehow Bannerman had tuned in on what he had just been thinking. He looked at himself and Bannerman in the mirror. "I'll tell you what I want," he said. He stopped again, confronted with the difficulty of putting it into words. He thought of all the things. But he had all the things, or all of them he could use, and now it was only a continual process of getting rid of them when they got beat up and getting new and better ones as new and better ones came out. That was part of it, but there was more than that, and strongly and clearly Billy came into his mind's eye. He knew what he wanted for Billy ; he wanted Billy to grow up like Keith, strong and tall and straight like Keith, grow up a good kid that you could be proud of and people complimented you on, with a sporty car of his own and a cute girl on the stool of the drugstore beside him ; Billy going off to some expensive

eastern school—Princeton, say, like Smitty—to be a lawyer, maybe, like Smitty, or a doctor. That ; but there was the other side he wanted for Billy too ; Billy checking out on his own at eighteen or so, starting off on his own on the long climb, tough, certain, unafraid, more unafraid than he had been ; he wanted that. Then he would be so damn proud. But he wanted Billy to wear suits like Smitty, to be able to talk like Smitty ; to be intelligent and smart too. He wanted so much to help now, to tell Billy, pass onto him what he had learned—but still for Billy to do it by himself.

He shook his head, because that wasn't it. Bannerman had asked what he wanted. What had he wanted, wanted over the years so it had never left him, on his back and snapping at his ankles while he ran, and nagging whenever he stopped to rest and—what had he wanted? "I want—" he said and shook his head again and felt all at once like a bolt given one turn too many by the big wrench, and he said, still quietly, "Don't you think I know what I want?" and knew it was no answer and knew he would never know what he wanted till he lost it, piece by piece, and that part of it had been lost now irretrievably, to Bannerman, and he yelled, "I've already got what I want! I've—" With a pounding in his ears like a heavy motor suddenly racing, he swung around and hit Bannerman blindly with all his strength.

Bannerman and the stool went over backward, and he almost fell too, from the momentum of his arm. He saw, his eyes clearing, Bannerman catch himself and then stagger back, pick up the stool and sit down, with no expression at all on his wooden face—neither shock nor pain nor anger.

Warren caught his arm. "Bill!"

He jerked away and slid off his stool as Bannerman got to his feet. He tried to say it calmly. "I'm sick of bailing that little whore out of somebody else's bed every week. Let her turn pro. Maybe you can take up pimping steady and make yourself some money, Bannerman."

He almost laughed with triumph as he saw the expressionless brown face split. Exulting, he saw Bannerman's right

shoulder draw back. He raised his hands, knowing he was drunk and that Bannerman was going to knock him apart. Then he saw the fury and hate facing him turn to pity, and he knew he had lost. He yelled wordlessly, and just as he tried to slug Bannerman again someone ran into him, knocking him off balance—Ernie. The bartender caught him around the neck, doubled him over, and rushed him outside. He broke away, cursing, and swung on Ernie. Then he was sitting on the sidewalk with his jaw aching and his head spinning, and when he got to his feet there was no one in sight. He could hear nothing inside the Jacaranda. He wasn't going back in there, he was too drunk. It was no use hitting Bannerman—what the hell use was it to hit Bannerman? That was done.

He spat on the sidewalk and moved down to where he had parked the Cadillac, got in, and drove slowly and carefully home.

As his headlights glared into the open garage he saw the paper cartons of Bea's stuff stacked behind the rear bumper of the MG.

Inside, in the darkness of the living room, he groped his way toward the TV set and turned it on and waited, leaning on the cabinet, his jaw throbbing and his head spinning off in shallow, eccentric circles. The picture tube began to light, and he backed up and sat down in the contour chair. He pulled a book out from under him. It was the Babar book. He had read it to Billy before Billy had gone to bed, and Billy had stood beside him, leaning over to see the pictures but not quite touching him. He had made Billy drink a glass of milk before he went to bed—Billy hadn't eaten any dinner—and when he'd gone to the bathroom later he saw that Billy had puked it into the toilet. Something caught in his throat and made a small, high sound.

Or maybe he hadn't made the sound. Somebody was singing on the TV. A girl came into focus on the screen. She wore a short, checked dress, she tilted her head coyly from side to side, she held her hands clasped at her waist, she sang:



"I'm going back to Arkansas,  
To see my dear old gray-haired ma,  
Going to see my brother Ted,  
That cute li'l baby tow-head—  
And I'm going to see my loved oooooooooone,  
And we'll"

With a swift motion he picked up the ashtray from the end table beside him and hurled it at the screen. The picture exploded with a small flash, leaving only darkness. The girl's song continued undisturbed:

"—waaaaaalk aloooooooooong together,  
And we'll—"

He turned the set off and cursed and rubbed his hands over his face and felt his stomach contract in a sharp cramp.

"That you, Mr. Gregory?" the detective called from the hall.

"Yeah," he said. He turned toward the hall. "All right," he said. "You can get going, Wilcox. Get dressed and go home. Send me a bill."

He sat down on the couch and squeezed his forehead between his hands. He heard Wilcox heavy-footing it down the hall. If he woke Billy up—Wilcox turned the light on.

He held his hand up over his eyes. "Turn it off!"

The light was turned off. "Say, how'm I going to get back to San Diego, Mr. Gregory? It's late and—"

"Take a cab. Put it on the bill. Go on, get going."

"Well, can I use your phone to—"

"No!" He lay down on the couch, his back to the room, listening to Wilcox go out and close the door, and then he was spinning off into darkness filled with too many people and things and cars and shouting and his own voice calling for them to be still, calling for order, and then there was Billy beside him, leaning against his shoulder, and he was telling Billy, clearly explaining to him how it all worked, how you had to

do it all for yourself, how you had to learn that there was no one to help you, how you had to make the little car move by yourself and start early at it because the car got bigger and bigger and bigger—

**TUESDAY**



## Tuesday 1

It was light when Keith drove through Riverside, on the way back. There were still another fifty or sixty miles to Mardios Beach. The gas gauge needle was leaning down below a quarter full, but maybe there would be enough. He glanced at Mary-Lynn, huddled up beside him on the car seat, his sports coat spread over her, her dark head against his leg, her shoes set neatly side by side on the floorboards. His wife.

He tramped down on the gas pedal, speeding up to seventy again as they came out of the town, flexing his tired shoulders, changing position gently in order not to wake Mary-Lynn, stretching his tired eyes wide and blinking them against the nagging sleepiness. There was little traffic. There had been little traffic last night, and they had been able to make it to Las Vegas in less than six hours. Now he could estimate that at around eight o'clock they would be back in Mardios Beach. Since last evening he and Mary-Lynn had driven over six hundred miles, had had a hamburger and a cup of coffee, and had been married.

And no more. Because he had run out of money. He had only two dollars left, enough for half a tank of gas or for breakfast, but not for both. He looked at the gas gauge again and hoped there was enough to get them to Mardios Beach; glanced at his watch, which said eight minutes to seven, and hoped that Mary-Lynn would not wake up and want breakfast.

If he had just had the guts last night to tell her to wait, he thought for the thousandth bitter time. Or even that he had changed his mind. But he had made his deal when he had decided he would not go see Hattie last night but would drive Mary-Lynn home instead, and before that he had begged Mary-Lynn to marry him; and he was ashamed of himself for

this disloyalty anyway. He tried to push it from his mind, wincing and stretching his shoulders again. He had never felt so tired. Just last Thursday he had driven from Berkeley down to Mardios Beach, which was five hundred miles, and had not felt especially beat. But now he was exhausted, his eyes felt like the charred snubbed-out ends of cigarettes, and everything inside him wrenched and frightened and tired of fighting with Mary-Lynn.

A car came toward him, rapidly enlarging, passed with a snatching whock of sound. A pebble thrown up by its wheels slashed across the windshield with a startling crack. It left a tiny scar on the glass, like a transparent bug stuck there. The brown rolling countryside hurled itself at him, coming slowly in the distance and congealing and coming faster, and then in the rearview mirror slowing and coming to rest once more. the white line in the centre of the road was reeled up endlessly by the left front tire, the grease-spotted asphalt slid endlessly away under the hood. Why hadn't he— "Damn!" he whispered, shaking his head. He looked at his watch, at the speedometer, the gas gauge, the oil, the temperature, at Mary-Lynn asleep. They were going back to Mardios Beach because there was no place else to go, and what were they going to do when they got there? Mary-Lynn had asked that last night, over and over, and had seemed increasingly angry and frightened, more by something within herself than by his inability to answer, so that he had worried more about her than about the question. But what were they going to do? "Jesus Christ!" he whispered, the name somewhere between a curse and a prayer, at the realization of not knowing, of not being able to see, and of having, now, to try to see. What the hell would they *do*?

Mary-Lynn stirred. She sat upright, rubbing her eyes and looking out the window, his coat sliding off her body. On her own coat was pinned the brown broken gardenia he had bought her last night. She didn't look at him as she ran her hands through her tangled hair. Her face, grimy and fallen into a petulant slackness, was not pretty now. His wife; Mrs. Rankin,

like Hattie; but Mrs. Keith Rankin. On her ring finger was the ring for which he had had to pay five dollars at the little marriage parlor in Las Vegas. He could have bought the same thing in a five-and-dime for two bits.

"Hi," he said.

"When will we be there?"

"In about an hour."

She rubbed her eyes. "I feel just awful. Let's stop and get something to eat and some coffee."

"We'd better drive straight through, Mary-Lynn. I've only got about two dollars left and maybe we'll have to get gas."

She glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes. They were bloodshot. She wet the tips of her fingers and touched them to the corners of her eyes. "What an awful rotten time," she said.

He nodded.

"Jeanne said it was just wonderful at the Desert Inn," Mary-Lynn said.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, mechanically. They'd been through all this in Las Vegas last night and on the way back until Mary-Lynn had cried herself to sleep. "I thought I had enough," he said as he had said so many times. "But I had to give the guy fifteen bucks and the ring cost five. And that gardenia, and gas."

"Five dollars for this!" Mary-Lynn said, looking down at the ring.

"What a rook."

"What a rook," Mary-Lynn said, and he saw her mouth tighten. Then her face tightened all over, and he thought she was going to start crying again, and when she cried he had no defence.

"It's just going to be like this," Mary-Lynn said.

"It's going to be all right. Listen—"

"It's just going to be like this," she said and made a little crying sound, then stopped and sat looking down at the ring. "Well, I know why you wouldn't wire your mother for some money," she said. "Because she—"

"I told you why!" He thrust his foot down harder on the accelerator. He wouldn't let himself fight with her. She was tired and cross and disappointed. It had been pretty awful for 'ner, all right; he couldn't blame her. He wouldn't blame her for anything. "Listen, honey," he said, "we went all over this. Let's not fight. This is our first day of being married and we don't want to start out fighting."

"I don't know why I was so dumb. It's just going to be like this."

"Aw, Mary-Lynn—"

"Everything just awful," Mary-Lynn said. "Just crummy and awful. Drive all night and then just drive around a little in Las Vegas and gawk and have a hamburger. I wanted to stay at the Desert Inn. And this ring and his cheap old gardenia, and we couldn't even have a drink! And when we get back your mother's just going to be awful. And Uncle Douglas and my mother and everybody's going to be just awful." She scrubbed at her eyes with her fists, like a little girl. "And then you wanted to do it on the car seat. Well, I'm not going to spend my wedding night on a dirty old car seat!"

"You already did, Mary-Lynn."

She began to cry—hard, harsh sobs that jerked at him as they must at her. He drove in silence, numbly. Finally she stopped sobbing and only sniffed from time to time. He heard her blow her nose. Staring straight ahead at the highway, he said with an effort, "I'm sorry. Mary-Lynn. It was all my fault. I didn't think—"

"But why wouldn't you wire your mother for some money?" she cried. "Oh, but you couldn't do *that*, could you? You just *couldn't*. But you're my husband now," she said, and abruptly her voice changed to become puzzled, scared, thin and high, but still demanding. "You've got to. I've got a right to expect you to take care of me, don't I?"

"I'm going to take care of you!"

"All those beautiful places, and we just drove around."

There was nothing he could say to that.

"And you don't even know what we're going to do when we



get back. What are we going to do?" She stared at him through swollen, bloodshot eyes.

"Well, I'm going to get a job and we'll rent a little place and—"

"Oh, how could I have been so *dumb*," she said, and what cut into him was that she didn't sound hysterical now, but calm. "Why did I ever let you talk me into this awful, awful mess?"

"Oh, for Chrissake, Mary-Lynn!"

"Don't you curse at me! Is that the way you feel about me?"

"Well, what did you want to say something like that for?"

"Because everything's going to be the way I just can't stand it to be! And you're—"

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, let's forget it then. Okay. You've got the licence—go ahead and tear it up!"

"Oh no, I won't tear it up," Mary-Lynn said.

He drove in utter misery. His stomach felt pushed in upon itself with hunger, his eyes burned, he was afraid to think past the end of this trip and ashamed of himself for yelling back at Mary-Lynn. "You're my husband now," she had said, and he had to recognize what it meant, feeling it more and more, seeing his responsibility, his duty. He had taken it on, hadn't he? Like everybody did when they were married. Complete responsibility not just for himself all of a sudden, but for himself and for another person too. He stared into the responsibility and the future.

"Well, what we'll do," he said. "We can find a little apartment around. And I've got this job working for Dick for a while. I'll make about sixty dollars a week, and maybe we can live on that. Or maybe I could get a job down at the aircraft plant in San Diego. If we get too broke we could sell my car—" He stopped.

"That's silly," Mary-Lynn said, but she sounded as though she felt a little better. "We don't need to sell the car. What would we do if we didn't have a car?"

He nodded slightly, thinking about the car, and thinking about Dick Bannerman wanting him to go down to Hattie's

last night. He had wanted to go, he had been going to go, but he had been glad enough to put it off on the excuse that he had to take Mary-Lynn home to San Diego, and then Mary-Lynn had put it up to him about all his talk about running off to get married. Somewhere along the line you had to start standing up to the things you'd done and said. In a way he was married now because he had crumped out of going to see Hattie last night, and because of what he had done to Mrs. Gregory, and how much else? How could he ever make up what he'd caused to happen to Mrs. Gregory? But it was like some bully kept pushing you around and pushing you around and finally you'd had enough chickening out and you called him—on some point that wasn't worth it and maybe was all wrong besides. But you had to call him sometime. This was where he had chosen to stick, and he suspected, too, that Mary-Lynn had wanted to go to Las Vegas because she was mad at her Uncle Douglas for sending her home; and Mr. Bogan had been going to send her home because of him, Keith. It all worked around to him, and he had done what he had to do, even knowing, as he had known in the few minutes they had spent in the crummy little marriage parlour, that it was all wrong.

"We're going to stay at the hotel when we get back," Mary-Lynn said.

"Well, I don't know if we can do that. That costs like hell, Mary-Lynn."

She was silent for a long time. She leaned over against her door, her stocking feet tucked under her. Finally she said, "Well, I'm going to stay at the hotel. You can stay with me if you want to, but I'm going to stay there. Your mother's going to pay for it too. I don't care if she hates me. She's got to—"

"She doesn't hate you! What do you mean she hates you? Listen, honey, we've got to start out being pretty sensible. We can't just go throwing money around that we haven't got."

"Oh, don't be silly! You can get some money from your mother. Why shouldn't you? She's got plenty. Anyway, you have to. You have to take care of me because we're married, and if you can't, then she has to. We're going to stay at the

hotel and—”

“I’ve told you a thousand times,” he said hoarsely. “I *can’t* go get any money from her. I was a real bastard to her about that Bill Gregory business, and I can’t just stop being a bastard and start scrounging because I need money all of a sudden.”

“But what about *me*?” she cried, and her eyes blazed at him. “Why do I have to get cheated and cheated and cheated out of everything?” She turned away again and said in a distant voice, “Well, you have to. We’re going to see her as soon as we get back.”

As he slowed in the stop-and-go traffic of a little town he tried to think about what Mary-Lynn had said, fairly and according to his responsibility. He raised a hand to rub and knead at the back of his neck. Mary-Lynn was right. He had to do it, didn’t he? He had to make arrangements to borrow some money from Hattie. And they would stay in the hotel for a little while, for a honeymoon. Mary-Lynn had a right to a honeymoon, didn’t she? He had to be fair to her, who was his wife. And she had got cheated last night, all right. From now on he had to make everything as nice for her as he could, because she was his wife—and not like last night.

“If you won’t go I’ll go by myself,” Mary-Lynn said. “She’s got to—to provide for me.”

“Okay. I’ll go see her. But I guess maybe I’d better go by myself first.”

“I’m going with you.”

“All right,” he said. He guided the car slowly along through the traffic. Looking at the gas gauge, he was sure now that there was going to be enough gas to take them back to Mardios Beach, back to Hattie’s house. He put his hand out for Mary-Lynn’s, and she let him take it. He drove along through the traffic and then out of town, speeding up on the highway, holding her hard little hand.

## Tuesday 2

HATTIE was drinking a cup of coffee by herself in the kitchen when she heard the thud of the paper against the garage door. She went out to get it and, slapping the folded newspaper against her leg, walked around the house to the boardwalk, taking deep breaths of the conglomerate smell of the ocean and the beach, and faintly, of the exhaust fumes from the highway. The sun was not visible yet above Mardios Heights, but the day was clear, the fog had retreated and lay offshore, the gray-white solid wall rising precisely at the end of the pier. Heavy groundswells were rolling in. A beautiful day for Keith's wedding—or maybe they had been married last night.

She went back into the house through the front door and dropped the paper on the couch, and thought of Bea, asleep in Keith's room. She felt ashamed of what she had felt so intensely last night, that Dick Bannerman had to love Bea, and Bea Dick Bannerman, that they must happily unite, live happily ever after in the formula of happiness out of magazines and movies, where you filled in the blanks and Bill Gregory was the villain, Bea the heroine, Dick the hero who saved the heroine and married her, and the villain was kicked in the teeth, or possibly he repented. But Bill would not be kicked in the teeth so that he noticed it and would not repent, and Dick was no hero and a confirmed bachelor, and Bea was no heroine but a weak-kneed and bloodless little housewife. Things would go along as they always had, with little or no high romance, only a few scraps of qualified happiness for some and for others, who didn't even notice the lack, none. And someone like Keith married someone like Mary-Lynn Sieber.

But maybe Keith thought what he and Mary-Lynn had done

was high romance, and maybe he thought he was happy. She wondered if he would call her, to tell her he was married. Probably they would be coming back to Mardios today or tomorrow. There was nothing to do but wait, and she had never been any good at waiting.

It was only a little after eight though when she heard the car stop in front of the house and knew it was Keith's car.

She stood listening to the footsteps on the walk beside the house—the two sets of footsteps. There was a knock on the door, the front door; Keith had always come into the house through the garage and never knocked. She moved quickly to the door, opened it. Mary-Lynn came in first, wearing a wrinkled black dress, black suede shoes, carrying a black suede bag, her hair freshly combed but hanging limply so that the rims of her ears showed through the dark hair, her mouth freshly painted. She glanced quickly down to see if there was a ring on Mary-Lynn's finger, and glanced up and tried to smile, and then looked past Mary-Lynn to where Keith stood behind his wife—tall but not gawky any more, not so young any more, solemn, tired, worried-looking, unhappy-looking. It was as though she had not seen him for an interval of years.

"Well, congratulations!" she said.

Mary-Lynn took hold of Keith's arm possessively.

Now she should kiss Mary-Lynn as a mother-in-law should. But she said, "Well—so you went off to Las Vegas."

"We got married," Keith said.

"I'd never have guessed it," she said and tried to laugh. But she was thinking of the time she and Bill had gone to Las Vegas. Keith could not have known of that, yet because of it he and Mary-Lynn had gone—and had been married. No, that was only part of it, for maybe Keith loved this girl. And maybe she loved him; she had to think Mary-Lynn did. "You must have been driving all night," she said.

"We're awfully tired," Mary-Lynn said.

"You must be," she said. That had been their wedding night—driving all night. On her own, Bunny had had to play a date with a pickup band in a dive in Chicago, and she had

sat at a table near the bandstand, waiting for two o'clock to come so they could go back to their dirty cheap little hotel room, crying into the glass of ginger ale she had nursed throughout the evening and trying not to let Bunny see that she was crying, while his trumpet soared clear, true, and beautiful in her ears. The trumpet had been all that was beautiful, everything else muddled and discordant and ugly.

She wondered if she should tell Mary-Lynn what Bogan had said last night. "Mary-Lynn—" she began, stopped. "Mary-Lynn, I want you to know I'm very happy for you. I hope you and Keith will be happy."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rankin," Mary-Lynn said and smiled a tired, set little smile.

"Thanks, Hattie," Keith said.

"I wish you'd both sit down. You must be pretty beat-up by now. Can I get you some breakfast or—"

"I'm awfully hungry," Mary-Lynn said.

"Well, I'll fix a big breakfast. What would you like? Baked eggs? I can—"

"Baked eggs would be great," Keith said.

"Can I take a shower, Mrs. Rankin?" Mary-Lynn said.

Mary-Lynn's eyes had never left her. She knew what Mary-Lynn was looking for and knew she must not let it show—if she even felt it at all now.

"I'm just *filthy*," Keith's wife said. "My hair—" She made the appropriate gestures, which were the gestures of a nineteen-year-old girl.

Maybe she was only that; she prayed that she had been mistaken. "Of course. If you don't mind being a little quiet. Bea Gregory is sleeping in your room, Keith."

"Who?" Mary-Lynn asked.

"Mrs. Gregory," Keith said and seemed to know. Mary-Lynn started for the bathroom.

She knew she should get Mary-Lynn a clean towel, get her the shampoo, but Mary-Lynn was walking rapidly away with her head held high and her heels tapping on the floor. And she was alone with Keith.

She smiled at him, and was shocked at herself because she had made the smile coquettish, as though to win him back. She said quickly, "Well, big boy, do you want to help me whip up some breakfast?"

"Sure." He followed her into the kitchen, and she busied herself getting eggs and bacon from the refrigerator, turning on the oven, taking out pans, putting coffee water on. Keith tried to help and got in the way. She directed him to make the toast. Then she saw how tired he was.

"You look like you'd better go take a nap," she said.

"I'm all right."

She turned to the stove, then back to him again. "All right all right?" It was a question she used to ask him when he was younger, whenever she hadn't seen him for a long time. "Are you all right, kid?" she would ask, and he would say, "Sure," and then she would ask, "All right all right?" She wondered if he would remember.

"Sure," he said and grinned at her, but it wasn't much of a grin. "Sure, Hattie, I'm all right."

"Are you happy?" she asked and felt great pride at being able to ask that after what had happened.

"Sure," he said, his eyes averted as he fished slices of bread out of the waxed-paper bread wrapper. She heard the faint rushing of the shower in the bathroom.

"She's quite a girl," she said.

Keith nodded vigorously.

"I talked to her yesterday, you know."

"Did you?"

"Didn't she tell you? We talked you over. That's probably why she didn't. She said she thought you should finish college. I thought this might be getting ready to happen and I wanted to ask her about that. I think it's so damn important. Keith, you are going to finish college, aren't you?"

"I don't know," Keith said.

She turned to break the eggs into the ramekins. The oven-heat light on the dashboard of the stove had come on.

"I guess not right now," Keith said. "I guess I have to get

out and make a living, Hattie. You know, I'm a married man now."

"Is she going to have a baby, Keith?"

"No. Thanks a lot."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"I know it," Keith said. Then he said, "Hattie, I'm so damn sorry about the way I acted."

She shook her head violently without turning toward him.

"Yeah, I want to say it. I'm not just saying it because I have to ask you for something now either. I've been sorry all along—for a couple of days anyhow—but—well, I guess I was madder at myself for being a jerk than at anybody else. And I didn't know how to—"

She slid the ramekins into the oven. She slopped egg on the oven door and said, "Damn!" Keith snatched a dishrag and mopped up.

"Sure," he said. "Let's forget it. It was what you were trying to tell me that night, wasn't it? Well, I kind of knew about it anyway, but a lot of things happened and threw me. You said that night we ought to accept each other as we are. I'm ashamed as hell of the way I was. Honestly. But Hattie—I have to ask you—can you lend me some money to get started on?"

"Of course," she said and wondered how much he would need, and thought of all her fine plans for selling the shops and starting over again, and saw them all collapsing in a close-knit irony of action and reaction, cause and effect. She heard the distant urgent beating of the water in the shower cease. "How much will you need, Keith?" she said.

"I don't know. I don't think too much." He put two pieces of bread in the toaster and smacked the lever down. Under his eyes the smudges of fatigue looked like grease stains. "I've got this job working for Dick till I get squared around and see what I want to do—try to do. But—" He gave her an embarrassed glance. "See," he said, "I didn't have enough money last night so we couldn't stay in Las Vegas and Mary-Lynn felt pretty—gypped. You know. We got married and all we could



do was turn around and come back. It was pretty crummy. Well, she wants to stay at the hotel for a while. I mean, she's got a right to some kind of honeymoon, hasn't she? Except I'm so damn broke."

"Don't worry about a thing." The coffee water was boiling, and she poured it into the top of the drip pot. "I'll tell you what. You and Mary-Lynn could stay in this house, and I'll go camp with Katie Morse in San Diego. It'll give me a vacation from that long drive twice a day. You and Mary-Lynn talk it over."

"Sounds great!" Keith said. "If it won't put you out too—"

"Don't be silly."

"After a week or so we'll start living the way we can afford to, and I'll be getting paid. I'll want to pay you back for everything."

"Well, we'll see. Maybe we'd better see about getting Mary-Lynn a better ring. And that car's yours, you know—we'll get it taken out of my name."

The toast popped up; Keith took out the two pieces, put in two more, slammed the handle down. "That car," he said in a strained voice. "You know, when I was so shook there I kept thinking I ought to give it back to Bill Gregory—because he'd given it to you," he said, flushing deeply. "But I was too gutless, and that was one of the things that made me so damn mad at myself. Now I don't know what the hell. Mary-Lynn's always thought it was my car. It doesn't seem like it would be fair to Mary-Lynn to— but—"

She swung around toward him. "How would it be if I paid Bill for the car and you paid me? We'll figure out some long-term instalment deal. How would that be, Keith?"

He wouldn't meet her eyes, but he nodded. "Yeah," he said huskily. "That would be the way. I'd like to do it that way, Hattie."

Now, she thought, she could tell him about the shops, and they could talk it over between them. She knew she had to, just because she had never told him about Bill; not to try to make him think how noble she was, or how repentant even,

but just because selling the shops and repaying Bill immediately was something she had to do. And he must face the fact that money was going to be tight too. She thought he could face it, and sensibly.

"I'm selling two of my shops," she said.

Keith started and stared at her.

"I owe Bill thirty-eight thousand dollars," she said, "I want to pay it off. I'll have to sell the downtown shop and the Coronado shop and this house. I'll either go to work managing the La Jolla shop and take an apartment in La Jolla, or I'll let Katie Morse manage the La Jolla shop—she's good—and I'll go to work as a—"

"Why?" Keith said hoarsely. "Because—"

"Because I want to."

"Because of me? Because I threw such a—"

"No. Not because of you now. Anyway, I'm not going to be exactly loaded with cash, but we can make out. I'll make a living and I can help you for a while, I think."

"You don't have to help me."

"Keith!" she said and looked at him intensely; he was moist and dim in her eyes. "You're my son."

He put his hands up to his face and scraped them down hard. "Jesus, Hattie," he muttered, and then he was looking past her.

She turned to see Mary-Lynn in the doorway, her hair damp and curling at the ends, her scrubbed face stiff and bright-eyed—and she knew that Mary-Lynn had heard.

They all stood there, and there was nothing for her to say, and she knew there was nothing for Keith to say, or Mary-Lynn.

Keith cleared his throat. "Hey, Mary-Lynn, Hattie says we can stay here for a while. In this house I mean."

Mary-Lynn looked from her to Keith. Her mouth was tight and small. "I want to stay at the hotel," she whispered. "Why can't we stay at the hotel?"

"Well, listen, Mary-Lynn—"

"Of course you can stay at the hotel if you want to," she

said.

The big, dark, hostile, scared eyes swung toward her. Mary-Lynn brought her hands up and clenched them together at her waist, showing the cheap ring Keith had bought for her. "I thought you were—" she whispered, then stopped. She looked at Keith. "What are we going to do?" she said. "I don't know what—"

"It's going to be all right, honey," Keith said. "Listen, let's not start worrying about every—" The toast popped up; he started, swung around to take out the two pieces and drop in two more slices of bread. He stood there holding the toast. "It's going to be okay, Mary-Lynn," he said.

"I'm not going to sleep in somebody's back bedroom!" Mary-Lynn said. She dropped her hands, raised them again; they worked together at her waist. She looked down. "You're just doing it because you hate me. I know you hate me!"

"No," she said, and her voice shook. "You're not to think that! It's not true." It had not been true since she had remembered herself on her own wedding night, crying into her ginger ale, confused, resentful, and afraid. She was sorrier for Keith, who was her son; but she was sorry for Mary-Lynn too.

"What did you want to say that for, Mary-Lynn?" Keith demanded in an anguished voice.

She put out her hand to take Mary-Lynn's hand, and Mary-Lynn let her take it. The hand was cold and tense. "Mary-Lynn," she said, "I'm not exactly in red-hot financial shape, as I was just telling Keith. But I can always get my hands on some cash. You and Keith will have a honeymoon on me, as my wedding present. Keith will probably have to work hard and save the rest of the summer, and in the fall I'm going to try to dig up the cash for him to go back to Cal. You remember we talked about that. You and Keith could take an apartment up in Berkeley. Probably he'll have to get a part-time job to help out. Or you could—"

Mary-Lynn jerked her hand away and her face twisted terribly—almost, she thought with a wrenching shock, maniacally. Mary-Lynn's lips moved but she didn't speak aloud.

Keith said, "She's just tired, Hattie. We had a pretty tough night of it. and she's been pretty scared about how everybody was going to take this." He put his arm around Mary-Lynn and patted her back. Mary-Lynn stood there stiffly, her face composed now. Only the fingers of her left hand moved, ceaselessly turning the cheap ring on her finger.

She, Hattie, took a deep breath and said, "I'd better tell you about your uncle, Mary-Lynn. He called a couple of times last night. He doesn't seem to like Keith much. He's been talking to your mother and father on the phone, and he said they were going to get a lawyer and try to have it annulled. I don't know if they can, but—"

"They can't," Mary-Lynn said calmly. "You can't do that. Because it's been—"

"Not *her*, Mary-Lynn," Keith said. "She's talking about your uncle."

"—because it's been con—consummated," Mary-Lynn said.

"Something's burning," Keith said.

She opened the oven and snatched out the ramekins with a holder. The eggs were crusty and brown on top, blackened around the edges. "Yes, why don't we sit down and eat?" she said. "Let's all sit down and have a cup of coffee and some burned eggs and we'll feel better."

"They can't do that," Mary-Lynn said.

"Probably they can't. I just wanted to tell you what was going on over there. Now, let's—"

"Well, if you all want it annulled so much—" Mary-Lynn said and stopped. Her face flushed. Keith looked suddenly haggard. "If that's what you want," Mary-Lynn said and stopped again. She twisted the ring on her finger. "Well, I don't care! If everybody's going to raise such a stink I don't care. But—"

"What're you trying to say, honey?" Keith said quietly.

Mary-Lynn twisted her shoulders and stepped away from him. "Well, I know how *she* feels about me! And *you* don't care. You just—"

"No," Keith said.

"Oh yes," Mary-Lynn said, and she, Hattie, wondered how Mary-Lynn could say it right out like this, and look her in the eyes while saying it. But maybe Mary-Lynn believed what she was saying. "Oh yes!" Mary-Lynn said. "I'm not that *dumb*. Well, all right, if that's the way you feel; but you talked me into going off to Las Vegas, you know."

"Aw, Mary-Lynn, cut it out!"

"Well, you've got to provide for me," Mary-Lynn said.

She heard the pop of the toaster behind her. Keith was looking down at Mary-Lynn almost abstractedly; she couldn't bear to think how this must hurt.

"You have to provide for me," Mary-Lynn said again. "I want—" Her throat worked; she blinked, then opened her eyes wide. "I want an interest in your shops," she said. "You're not going to sell your shops and get out of it either. I want a part interest. Or one of your shops for my own." Then her voice broke and her steady, commanding gaze broke, and she said almost pleadingly, "I just want a start."

Keith said, "Why don't we sit down and eat some breakfast," and she was proud of him for saying it.

Mary-Lynn sobbed suddenly and pressed the heels of her hands into her eyes. Then she dropped her hands and stood stiffly erect again and no tears showed. "I'm not going to eat here," she said. "I'm going to eat at the hotel."

Keith leaned against the refrigerator, looking down, his long legs crossed.

"Nobody's going to rook me out of anything!" Mary-Lynn said, and Keith nodded without looking up.

Mary-Lynn moved with three quick steps into the living-room doorway, turned back once more. "Well, I'll be at the hotel when you decide," she said. "I'm going to the hotel and you're going to pay for it!" A sob tore loose from her again. "And I'm going to buy some clothes at the hotel shop and charge them, and I'm going to take the car because it's half mine!" she cried. She turned. Her running footsteps sounded in the living room. The front door was slammed; her running footsteps sounded on the walk.

"I guess I ought to stop her," Keith said and pushed himself away from the refrigerator. He moved toward the back door but stopped as the starter of his car ground, the motor raced. "Well, maybe I'd better not go after her till she calms down a little."

"Do you want to eat now?" she asked dully.

He turned toward her. "Hattie, I'm married to her. I'm responsible. I've got to do what I can."

She nodded, staring at him, at her son, who had grown up so suddenly. Faintly she heard the crash.

"Hell on fenders when you get married," Keith said and laughed shakily. But he opened the back door and hurried down the steps into the garage. She moved forward, saw him open the garage door and stand there in the bright sunlight, gazing down the street. He glanced back at her and shrugged, then walked out of her range of vision.

"What was that?" a voice said. Bea was standing behind her, in the kitchen doorway, wearing the white terry-cloth robe. Her face was dead white. "What was that noise? Hattie, go look, will you please?"

She went down into the garage and out the open door and looked up the street. Keith was running along the sidewalk. His car was stopped in the middle of the street near Bill's house. Mary-Lynn was standing beside it, leaning on the open door.

She couldn't see anything that could have caused the crash; it must have come from the highway. She went back through the garage.

Bea was standing at the top of the steps, her hands clutching the front of the robe. "*What was it?*"

"Nothing that I could see."

She mounted the steps, thinking of Keith running to Mary-Lynn, the two of them embracing, and wondering how they could ever patch it up, wondering what was to become of them.

Bea was leaning weakly in the door frame. Her eyes were closed. "Have you ever done that?" Bea whispered. "Had a terrible dream and then heard a sound and it became part of the dream? Oh, God, I was frightened."

As she moved into the kitchen past Bea, suddenly she felt turned to water, and she couldn't look at Bea for fear Bea would see in her face the sudden knowledge of what the crash must have been.

## Tuesday 3

HIS breath was tearing at his lungs when he reached the car. Mary-Lynn leaned on the open door on the driver's side as though she were tied there, as though she would collapse if she moved. Billy's toy car was squashed half under the front bumper.

"Keith," Mary-Lynn was whispering. "Keith— Keith—"

He moved past her purposefully as though there were something he could do—and stopped. He knew Billy was dead. "Keith," Mary-Lynn whispered behind him. The chrome upright on the bumper had dug into Billy's body and the little blue-and-white-checked shirt was a mess of blood, the body in the checked shirt bent, broken, back over the seat and a bright stripe of blood still flowing down the centre of his forehead and his mouth still open as though he were screaming.

He turned reluctantly toward Mary-Lynn. She leaned on the open door, her round, dazed, terrified eyes staring into his. She whispered, "Is he dead? Is he?" He nodded, and immediately she said, "I couldn't help it. You can certainly see that, can't you? He was coming down the hill and I tried to stop—I did stop! I was stopped, but he—"

"We have to get a doctor," he said and felt a sudden wild thrill of hope that a doctor could fix that broken body. But he knew no doctor ever could. He turned away from Mary-Lynn.

"Keith," she whispered.

The curtains were drawn in the windows of Bill Gregory's house, the black Cadillac convertible stood in the drive. Behind the house was the fog bank, but in the street it was sunny, and he could feel the sharp warmth of the sun on his forehead and on his tired shoulders. He looked up and down the sunny street. There was no one in sight. Where the hell was everyone? Except for the steady roar of traffic along the highway, which was part of the silence in Mardios, and Mary-Lynn's harsh, shallow breathing, there was no sound. It was as though, if he didn't look at Billy, dead, Billy was not dead, was not even there; it was as though some time before this everyone in Mardios had suddenly and urgently departed so that there had been no one to hear the crash, and so there had been no crash. But he had heard it, and he had seen Billy.

"Keith, what're we going to *do*?" Mary-Lynn whispered. She held one hand to the side of her head and around a finger coiled and uncoiled a lock of still wet hair. "You've got to help me!" He saw a drop of spit wet the corner of her red mouth. "Keith you've got to—" She stopped and looked down at Billy and closed her eyes tightly.

He looked down at Billy too, at Billy crushed and dead, and realized with a sharpening of all his senses, like the exposure of a raw nerve, death and his responsibility now. The little car like an imitation of Bill Gregory's big Cadillac, blood like thick oil that had dripped from a leaking crankcase. He stepped toward the little car and something rocked and scraped beneath his foot. It was one of the chrome wheels that had been knocked off. The chrome was brilliant in the sun and showed his distorted reflection, thick body, tiny head. He tried to touch Billy's chest in the checked shirt and could not, and bent over suddenly as though he had been struck in the stomach and had to retch.

He heard a rapid cracking of heels on the pavement behind him. Mary-Lynn was running across the street. She ran awkwardly, not fast; at the far curb he had a glimpse of her white face as she looked back. She ran south along the sidewalk, her little hips bouncing in the black skirt. He didn't want to watch



her run, but when he had turned toward Bill Gregory's house again he could still hear the rapid tapping of her heels on the cement.

He moved back around the car and up Bill Gregory's driveway. His feet made a slow scuffing sound. He touched the rear fender of the black Cadillac as he passed it, then stopped and turned. He couldn't see Mary-Lynn any more. He couldn't see Billy or any part of the toy car, and, past the corner of the house, could see only the rear of his own car, which Bill had given Hattie, and Hattie him, and which Mary-Lynn had driven off in because it was half hers now; and if he had returned it to Bill Gregory when he had known he should—

He stumbled going up the steps to the front door. Even before Mary-Lynn had fled he had accepted, without thinking, his responsibility; now he realized the awful completeness of it, the straight line from what he had yelled at Bill Gregory, the day before yesterday, to this.

He knocked on the door. As he waited he found himself swallowing continually, and he could feel the sweat tickling cold down his cheeks. He knocked again. Finally he pushed the door open. Bill Gregory was lying face down on the davenport, dressed in slacks and a sports shirt.

"Bill!" he called.

Bill Gregory didn't move.

He heard snoring, a low, steady, unlocalized sound. He could feel himself sweating. "Bill!" He went on in. The screen of the TV set was broken, and on the floor in front of it were broken glass, toy trucks piled with poker chips, the broken pieces of a ceramic ashtray, and a smear of ash and scattered cigarette butts.

"Bill!" he cried, but Bill Gregory didn't move.

The phone was in the hall. He stared into the black perforated disk set into the mouthpiece as the operator said, "Number please." On the black disk, too, he saw the little broken body and the blood on the blue and white shirt and on the white forehead, and Mary-Lynn running. "Number please," the operator said. He asked for the highway patrol.

To the man who answered, he said, slowly and carefully and so he could not turn back, "This is Keith Rankin. I've just run into a little boy. On Ocean Avenue in Mardios. He's dead." He turned to glance at Bill Gregory sleeping on the couch. "Keith Rankin," he said into the phone, although the man had not asked for his name again, and when he had hung up said his name still again, because it had sounded so strange: "Keith Rankin."

Then he said aloud, "Manslaughter." It was the term he had been trying to think of. It was manslaughter when you killed someone like that. It was manslaughter even if it was a little boy. What did they give you for manslaughter? Twenty years? Maybe it was only ten. He didn't think he'd ever heard what you get for manslaughter.

He went back into the living room, bent over the couch, grasped Bill Gregory's shoulder, and shook it. "Bill!" he said hoarsely.

The shoulder moved under his hand. Bill Gregory mumbled, "What the hell, what the hell now?" Bill Gregory tried to shake his hand off.

"Bill!"

"Lemme 'lone," Bill Gregory mumbled. "Up to you, kid. Gotta learn you gotta go push car uppa hill yourself. Doan come ask anybody else push you, nobody gonna push you. Gotta do it yourself, gotta—"

He jerked up on the shoulder and turned Bill Gregory over. The puffed, blotchy face gaped up at him, the eyes blinked. Bill Gregory shuddered and shook himself like a wet dog and tried to sit up.

"Billy's dead," he said, staring down at Bill Gregory's face. "Bill, Billy's dead."

"Wha?" The red eyes stared up into his eyes. Bill Gregory scraped his fingernails through his hair. "Wha?" He shook his head violently and suddenly his faced looked all squeezed together, as though it had been made out of dough and the dough pressed down hard. "What?"

"Billy's dead. I ran into him in his—"

Bill jumped to his feet and lost his balance and sat down again. "No!" he yelled. Bill got up again and stood very close to him, swaying a little, stinking of liquor and cigarette smoke and dried sweat, his face blotched red and white, staring at him with the pupils of his eyes like small round black bullets. He tried not to flinch as he saw the arm jerk back. "*You goddam—*" Then Bill Gregory's shoulders slumped and the fierce eyes were not focussed on him any more and Bill whispered, "No. I didn't tell him he could—" And Bill bumped against him, starting for the door, running heavily. Bill stood there a moment, leaning against the door frame and staring out at the street, then ran on out.

He started after Bill, not running. He caught up with Bill at the car. A Pontiac sedan had stopped across the street and a white-haired man had just got out. A woman sat inside with her hands covering her face.

Bill stood leaning forward a little, his hands raised chest high, looking down at Billy in the little car. "Billy?" he whispered in an inquiring tone. "Hey, boy— *Christ!*" He raised his hands farther and scratched his fingers through his red hair with a rasping sound. "No," he whispered. "Listen, I didn't tell you you could go out and coast down the goddam— Why didn't you wait till I—aw, *Christ!*" Bill cried and turned, his mouth open and drawn out tight and tears streaming down his face.

"What happened?" the white-haired man asked, coming obliquely across the street toward them.

"Get the hell out of here!" Bill said.

He watched the white-haired man retreat. He put his foot up on the bumper of the car and looked at the sweat soaking through the sleeves of his shirt in dark ugly spots, and watched as Bill leaned down toward Billy again. But Bill did not touch him.

"Where the hell is Bea?" Bill whispered and straightened up.

"I'm sorry, Bill," he said. It was all he knew to say. "I'm sorry, Bill. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't—"

"Nobody's fault," Bill said. He scratched his head. "Aw,

*Christ!"* he said. His face was shining with tears and they dripped off his chin.

He felt the tears now in his own eyes as he watched Bill helplessly. "Nobody's fault," Bill whispered, and then bent down and stood up again, holding the chrome wheel. Over Bill's shoulder he could see the two reflections in it.

"It wasn't anybody's fault!" Bill cried and hit the wheel with his fist and gasped with pain as the wheel clattered to the pavement. Bill held his fist to his mouth. The white-haired man and the woman in the Pontiac were whispering together, and another car was coming down Ocean Avenue from the north, slowing.

With a quick motion Bill jumped forward and scooped the chrome wheel up, turning and throwing it all in one action, the wheel spinning and glittering in the sun in a high arc. It lit on the roof of his house with a thump and a bounce, then disappeared, clanging down somewhere on the other side of the house, and Bill leaned over the fender of the car and buried his face in his arm.

Four more cars had stopped, and about a dozen people had formed a ragged circle, when he heard the siren. A black and white police car came along Ocean Avenue and nosed into the curb. Two state troopers jumped out. He felt his hands clenching and unclenching wetly as he watched them bend over Billy. They both straightened up at the same time and looked around.

"I'm Keith Rankin," he said, and one of the troopers moved toward him, taking a notebook from his pocket. He fumbled his wallet out of his pocket and his driver's licence from the wallet and gave the licence to the trooper. Another car had turned down from the highway and stopped to rubberneck, and people were coming out of the houses along Ocean Avenue now. He could see Hattie's house with the garage door open, and, as he looked, Hattie and Mrs. Gregory came out of the garage together.

"What happened?" the trooper asked in a cold businesslike voice, looking at him with cold eyes in a wrinkled tanned face.

As he told the trooper his story he watched Mrs. Gregory running along the sidewalk and Hattie coming more slowly behind her. The trooper took notes with a red mechanical pencil.

"Nobody's fault," he heard Bill Gregory say.

When he looked up again there were a great many more people, and they stood close around his car and the toy car, and some were looking at Billy, some at Bill, and many at him. He heard another siren and saw the white ambulance coming. It passed Mrs. Gregory, who was close now, running with one hand held against her chest. The siren ran down as the ambulance nosed through the separating crowd and stopped between his car and the white-haired man's Pontiac. The driver and the attendant got out. Through the window he could see the crisp white bed in the back. The second trooper and two other men were trying to get Billy's car out from under the bumper, bouncing his car up and down and sliding it toward the curb with each bounce.

He saw Mrs. Gregory trying to get through the crowd, and suddenly he swung away from the trooper and pushed through to her, glaring at the goddam gawks as he did so and saying, "Wait, please." He took her arm. "You don't want to go in there," he said. "Listen, Mrs. Gregory, don't go any closer."

"Please," she said, stretching up on her toes to try to see, pushing forward. He held her arm. The only thing he could think to do was to keep her from seeing this.

He heard a screech of metal. "You'd better not try to take him out of there," a voice said.

"Pick up the wagon and all."

"Please," Mrs. Gregory whispered. "Wait till I—" Her face looked like bacon fat.

"It's a little Cadillac!" someone said, and he saw Mrs. Gregory's white face break up like a pane of glass. She tore her arm away from his grasp.

"Well, pick it up and stick it inside, for Chrissake!" Bill Gregory yelled, and, turning, he saw Bill and a trooper and a fat man in a Hawaiian shirt pick up the little car with Billy in

the seat and slide it through the open rear door of the ambulance.

Mrs. Gregory screamed. She would have fallen if he had not held her. The scream beat, endless and piercing, in his ears; then it stopped with the whack as the ambulance door slammed shut. He held his arm tightly around her as the ambulance started forward, the siren coming on again, low and slow, rising as the ambulance gained speed, and continuing to rise to its own beating, mechanical scream.

Mrs. Gregory jerked away from him and pushed forward through the people surrounding his car.

"That's the kid that was driving," he heard someone say.

He didn't look to see who it was, moving after Mrs. Gregory, then stopping as he saw her standing in front of Bill Gregory. Bill Gregory was leaning against the fender, his hands hanging at his sides, and all at once everything was very quiet, with only the heavy humming sound from the highway and the quieter sound of the surf and in the almost-silence everyone watching hushed.

He heard Bill whisper, "Bea, it wasn't anybody's fault, Bea."

"You're crying, Bill," Bea said, and then the silence again.

He, Keith, was watching Mrs. Gregory and Bill Gregory, Mrs. Gregory in a blouse and a gray skirt a little too large for her—she must have borrowed them from Hattie—Bill in the loud shirt and wrinkled slacks, unshaven, and from the way they faced each other, like fighters, he knew that even now they didn't blame him for this but instead each blamed the other, and they would tear horribly at each other now, disregarding him, who had caused it all. Bill Gregory only thought that he had been driving the car.

Mrs. Gregory said very slowly, "Are you crying because he was so brave, Bill? Because he wasn't, Bill. He was just more afraid of you than of going down the hill."

Bill Gregory's cheeks shone wetly as he leaned there.

He saw the sun glint on the gold rim of the front tooth as Bill tried to grin, saw the weak sneer, the poor attempt to show that what Mrs. Gregory had said hadn't torn Bill's insides out.

He started forward to stop Mrs. Gregory from saying more; she couldn't say anything more like that to the poor guy! There was a stir toward the back of the crowd, and he sighed as he saw Dick Bannerman come through the people standing around Mrs. Gregory and Bill, Dick in his khaki shirt and pants and his thin face like brown bone. Dick caught Mrs. Gregory and swung her around against him, her face pressed into his chest.

He couldn't look at Bill as Dick drew Mrs. Gregory away, holding her close, the people moving silently away before them.

Dick swung around once more and caught his eyes, and then jerked his head back toward Bill.

He nodded, although Dick had gone on with Mrs. Gregory. He started over toward Bill Gregory, but the trooper with his driver's licence said, "Rankin." He had to stay with the trooper while Bill Gregory moved around the car and up the drive past the black Cadillac. The other trooper was shooing the people away.

He watched the first trooper take out a pad of tickets, and, copying from his driver's licence, start filling out the top one. Hattie came up beside him and took hold of his arm. The trooper frowned at her.

"This is my mother," he said.

"What're you going to do with him?" Hattie said, and he knew that she understood about Mary-Lynn. Her fingers made a steady pressure on his arm.

"I'll have to issue a citation," the trooper said. "I don't think he has anything to worry about though. It looks like he was stopped and the little boy hit him" Hattie's fingers on his arm relaxed their pressure. She looked up at him almost blankly.

"Is this address and phone correct?" the trooper said. "We'll be getting in touch with you about the inquest."

He looked at his driver's licence and nodded. They were correct. Rankin, Keith L., the licence said, white letters on black. Sex, M. Height 6-3, born, 1735, weight, 170, Colour

Eyes, brown, Colour Hair, dark brown—Married, no. He stared down at the Married-no that should be Married-yes while the trooper tore out the ticket and handed it to him. He put it and his licence in his breast pocket. The trooper moved away.

Hattie was looking up at him. "I guess I ought to go see Bill," he said.

He thought Hattie nodded, but he wasn't sure. But she probably understood. He ducked his head a little as he turned away from her and started up the drive toward Bill Gregory's house.

## Tuesday 4

RICHARD BANNERMAN drove up California Street and across the highway—the traffic on the highway stopped impatiently for him and Bea Gregory—and on up California Street. He drove slowly and with difficulty, for Bea's face was pressed into his shoulder and her arms were around him. He felt her body strain and shake occasionally from some terrible inner wrenching, and he smoothed his hand over her gold-brown hair with the gray stripe in it and murmured whatever came into his head, without thinking, guiding the pick-up truck in second gear up Mardios Heights to his house.

He stopped in the driveway and hurried around the truck to help her out. He held her under the armpits and gently let her down to the ground. He was amazed to see that she was not crying. Her eyes were huge in her face, like the eyes of some wild, intractable bird. "My ankle hurts," she said, looking at him. She stood holding onto the door handle, in her face something both of acceptance and fierce determination that made it almost beautiful. He wondered if she had really realized that Billy was dead—and knew she had; it was as though she



accepted it now coldbloodedly.

"I can't walk," she said again. "You'll have to carry me."

He picked her up. She was very light; Bea Gregory could not have weighed much more than a hundred pounds. But he knew the burden was not going to be light. As he carried her up the steps she laid her head on his shoulder once more, and he could feel the steady gaze of her eyes. He felt her breath on his throat. He had to let her down to get the door open. She leaned on his arm.

He picked her up again and carried her inside, moving slowly, as though to conserve his strength for carrying her down the miles of the years, carefully edging her past the sharp corners of the furniture and through the bedroom doorway, where, very carefully, he laid her on the bed.

He sat down beside her. The room was very dim and had a remote musty odour, like that of an old monastery where old monks lived out their lives. In the dim room, after the golden sunlight outside, he could not make out her features, but he could see her eyes. They shone like bright rocks seen through shallow water in the sun, and he knew she was weeping now and he was thankful and relieved.

"Goddam him," she whispered harshly, and he listened to her curse Bill Gregory. The words she used sounded reluctant and unfamiliar, but the more vile for that; he tried to tell himself the words were only part of her tears; still, from her, they shocked him profoundly.

"No," he said.

She turned her face away. "I know," she said in her own voice now. "But you have to blame someone. There has to be someone. Otherwise it's just too—"

"I know."

"Did you see Billy?"

"No."

She was silent for a long time, her face averted. He took hold of her hand, and she clutched his hand against her. "I had to," she said. "I mean I had to so—"

"He never knew what happened," he said quickly.

"Yes, he did. He must have known what was going to happen when he couldn't stop. Unless he never even saw Keith's car. I was just hoping that he didn't suffer after—after that. But maybe he had to suffer a little."

He tried to catch her thought, to understand. He could not, and was ashamed that he could not.

"But maybe he did feel very brave," Bea said. "Riding his car down the hill alone like that. Maybe he really did. It would have been so *clean* if he was just—killed riding down and feeling so brave and not knowing—it was just that it had to be *that* way. But I guess it did have to be that way."

"Did it have to be?" he asked.

"Of course," she said faintly. "Oh yes." She squeezed his hand very tightly, and then released it as though embarrassed.

"Bea, what can I do?"

"Just listen to me talk. I know I'm just stupid and hysterical, but I have to talk. Otherwise it just goes round and round. Did you know I was always hurt when you wouldn't let me talk very long in Great Books? I always thought you didn't want me to talk so much because I said silly things and embarrassed you. And when I'd stop by to see you at the house you're building, to talk—"

"I'm sorry."

"But now this is *mine!*" she said. "I know more about it than anyone in the world. No one else knows about it but me." Her face hardened into that shock of a face he had seen when he had swung her away from Bill Gregory—but immediately it relaxed. She closed her eyes. He saw her lips move, and he was reminded of the way Billy's lips had moved in that unsure practise of a sentence before it was given articulation—in some kind of secret speech to herself, or exhortation or prayer. "But he was my little boy," she whispered. "And I loved him so and I—my poor little boy," she whispered.

He put his hand on her forehead and felt her stiffen. Her forehead seemed to press up against his hand like a cat's back. Then he heard her sigh and she relaxed. "I guess you'd better leave me alone for a while, Richard," she said.

She did not move or speak again as he rose. The dark pools of her eyes stared straight up at the ceiling, as though they were searching for something in the blank expanse of plaster and the dusty glass light fixture. Quietly he left the room. ,

In the living room he stood tamping a cigarette on the face of his wristwatch. Almost nine o'clock; a boy had been killed. his mother lay in the darkened bedroom grieving and empty, but the world turned on, uninterrupted in its course. Down at the new house the carpenters would be cutting the sheathing boards on the power saw and nailing them into place. He glanced at Picasso's screaming horses and triumphant bull, and at Rouault's Christ tortured upon the Cross, and he was very aware of the old doubleness of Christ suffering in his own pain and Christ glorying in his symbolic agony. He must pull the curtains back and let some light into this room. He felt suddenly shaky and lightheaded, as if from the return of a familiar illness. He sat down on the couch, seeing for a moment, feverishly, the brown eyes of the seal with their intense scrutiny, and seeing Billy, not crushed in the little car but as a lamb on the altar with his throat cut and the bright blood mingled with the snow-white wool. He shook his head. He had not even seen Billy, dead. But perhaps it did not matter now, now that he was aware so strongly that he had fretted too long over those pictures on the wall, had deceived himself too long with the stylized, inadequate representation of tragedy and pain. Now he was caught in it, embraced by it. "Mine!" Bea had said, but his too. He found himself listening for the sound of her breathing in the bedroom.

He touched the lighted end of his cigarette to the back of his hand. He felt the pain. He raised his hand and wet the burned red spot with his tongue and then sat looking at it and feeling the pain with an intense concentration of his senses, as though he were a connoisseur tasting a new wine, holding the burned spot there in his eyes like a jewel in a pair of tweezers, the spot not a stigmata, not a glorious self-inflicted agony perpetrated as a symbolic act, but only a burn to be treated with vaseline. Yet pain too, to make him part of pain:

that much remained. He glanced around at the books, the records, the littered card table in the alcove, the glass covering the two pictures, which, from here, reflected each other in a confusion of colour, line, and design—glancing around as though there might be someone watching to whom he would have to explain his actions. But there was no one watching—there was only himself to see and to judge.

He leaned back on the couch and blew smoke toward the ceiling. His life marched past in jerky scenes like those of an old newsreel. He did not watch it with contempt, only with impatience that he had taken so long to arrive at something. Because at last he had found in a world full of misery, pain, hunger, tragedy, and blind, doomed striving, one pain he could alleviate; found in the vast abstract jungle of methods, plans, shouts, and pleas for this vague panacea or that doubtful remedy—or merely directionless protest—one concrete tragedy to give himself to.

He sat smoking and making plans and listening for the sound of Bea's breathing in the bedroom. When he heard a slight movement he rose abruptly, snubbed out his cigarette, and went in to her. But she had not moved; she lay in exactly the same position in which he had left her. He could see her face more clearly now. Pale, in the semidarkness it seemed to glow. Her hair lay soft around her head. Her swollen lips looked sensual, no longer merely bruised, and were parted as though beginning, practising, the enunciation of some word. He had never thought of her as having beauty before, but now it caught in his throat as though she had reached out and clutched him there. Her depthless eyes stared at him, calm and steady, and in them was a demand as palpable as a steel cable.

He moved toward her slowly, feeling a kind of awe. He saw her wet her lips. She raised her arms. He bent down, and her arms caught him.

"Give me a boy," she said in a curious flat voice, as though she were only asking for a light.

## Tuesday 5

IN THE living room Bill Gregory stood looking at the smashed picture tube of the TV, the shards of glass, the broken ash-tray, the ash and cigarette butts on the carpet, at the curtained windows, and the couch where he had slept last night. The silence was complete. He had to listen intently before he was aware of the sound of traffic on the highway, and of the waves.

Then a car started up in front and went away, and another. He went out to the kitchen and got a bottle of bourbon from the liquor cabinet. He stopped before the kitchen window, through which in the bright sunlight outside he could see the play yard, the swing and slide and merry-go-round, and the sandbox. When he started to open the bottle he saw the smudged fingerprint on the label of the bottle. The fingerprint was his, the smudge was blood. He raised his hand close to his eyes, but he could see no blood there now. He stood holding the bottle, staring out at the sandbox.

Finally he turned away from the window and splashed liquor into a glass. His hands were steady. He moved slowly back into the living room and put the bottle and glass down on top of the TV set. More afraid of you than of going down the hill, Bea had said, and her eyes and her face like that. What a hell of a thing to say in front of everybody. What a hell of a thing. He hadn't told Billy he could go down the hill. He'd been asleep. He remembered Billy leaning over him and asking him something again and again, stuttering. But he hadn't told Billy he could coast down the hill alone. Anyway, Billy had to learn to make decisions for himself, didn't he? Because when you make a mistake that was the way you learned. "God-dam dirty whore!" he cried.

He took a drink of the bourbon, and lines of it trickled

down his chin with the tears. He went over and sat down on the couch and thought of them at the hospital or wherever they'd taken Billy, trying to get him out of the little car. He couldn't think about it. But that was the way it was now, wasn't it? Kids driving around too fast in hopped-up cars and getting smashed up like that. Read about it all the time. But Billy was only four. I'm only ffffff-four; he felt a clawing at his leg and almost looked down but wouldn't let himself. The bourbon was strong and bitter in his mouth. It wasn't Keith's fault. He had already stopped, you could see that. The state cop had seen that. But it was the car he had given Hattie and the car he had given Bill. He felt as though he was going to puke, thinking of them trying to get Billy out of that little car. If only he hadn't— "Goddam bitch!" he said aloud. What a hell of an awful thing to say! She hadn't even cared about Billy, all she'd wanted was to scream something like that at him. Well, what the hell, probably the same thing would have happened in fifteen years or so when Billy had a regular car all gowed-up and hot-rod, hitting eighty with some teen-age snatch and a bottle of liquor or some reefers in the car, and the insurance already revoked so he would've had to pay off everybody. More afraid of you than of going down the hill. How could the kid have turned out any good with a bitch like that for a mother? Probably he was sick in the head like Bea. Probably he had been going to kick off anyway, puking up his milk like that last night, never eating anything. *More afraid of you—* He bowed his head until his forehead rested against his upper arm, and he wept.

There was a knock. He heard the door open and looked up to see Keith come in. Keith stopped just inside the door, his hands in his pockets, his jaw set to one side. He looked pretty scared.

"Bill, I've got to tell you about—"

He waved a hand at Keith. "No," he said. "You couldn't help it. Anybody could see that."

"It's not that," Keith said. "I mean, it's—"

Leave it alone! something in him almost screamed. "No,"

he said in a tight voice. "It's all done now. It's all—"

Keith came another step into the room. He licked his lips, then his jaw set itself off-square again.

"I've just been thinking about him," he said to Keith more quietly. "You know." He took a drink and sloshed the liquor around in his mouth. "He was a good little kid. He would've been okay. He'd have got over—"

"He was a real fine little kid," Keith said.

"Sure he was." He knew that Keith had heard Bea say that. Keith had been right there. And all the damn gawks had heard; but that didn't matter now. "Sure he was scared," he said. "Everybody's scared. But he wasn't chicken. Like he was scared of the water, scared to death of it, but he went running in there and jumped in—" He stopped, ashamed that Keith should see his tears. But he was glad Keith had come. "He was all right," he said. "He wasn't so afraid."

Keith stood there facing him, his mouth working. After a long time Keith said very slowly, "Coming down the hill like that. Pretty brave." He sounded as though he was choosing each word carefully. "I mean—"

"Sure," he said. "That's what I mean." He felt very grateful. He watched Keith sit down on the edge of a straight chair, his hands still in his pockets. Suddenly he wondered about Billy's toys. What the hell did you 'o with a kid's toys? "The only thing—" he said. "The only thing was, I gave him that little car. That goddam little car. Maybe parents are just too goddam stupid to live sometimes. But the trouble is, you see your kid growing up, and you want to keep him from all the things you did wrong yourself, growing up. Save him all the stupid mistakes. He was always whining around trying to get somebody to push him in that car. And I had to—" His voice began to shake, like a motor with the timing all shot. "Well, Jesus Christ!" he said. "He had to learn sometime! But he was only four."

Keith's head was bent down; he didn't speak.

"Well, maybe you shouldn't try to tell anybody anything," he went on. "Maybe he was different. From me, I mean. Maybe

you never can tell anybody anything."

"Well, I guess nobody ever listens," Keith said. "That's the trouble."

• "Yeah, but how the hell can you ever expect them to listen when they don't understand how things are yet? You don't learn anything listening." He got up unsteadily and poured himself another shot from the bottle on top of the TV set. "Want a drink, Keith?"

"No, thanks. I guess I'd better not."

He sat down again. Suddenly he saw, in a kind of oval of light, as in the broken picture tube of the TV, the doctors in their white uniforms and white masks, like the doctor in the cigarette commercials, trying to get Billy out of the little car. He closed his eyes and patiently shook his head until the image faded and vanished. When he opened his eyes again he could not see Keith's features in the dimness of the room, only the long pale shape of his face. "You know?" he said. "I'd always hoped he grow up like you, Keith."

He saw Keith slump back in the straight chair. He leaned back on the couch and clutched the drink against his chest.

"You know?" he said. "I was up in the Bay Area last winter and I thought about running over there to Berkeley to see you—see the university and the place you lived and all. But then I thought, what the hell, he doesn't want to see a crummy old used-car dealer. All your friends and all."

"I wish you'd come over," Keith said in that slow, careful way that didn't sound like him.

He knew goddam well Keith was lying, that Keith was only feeling sorry for him, but it didn't hurt much. There wasn't anything that could hurt any more.

"You come over next time you're up there, will you?" Keith said. "I mean it. I'd sure be glad to see you."—

"Keith—" he said. Then he saw the door swing open, he saw her stepping inside from the blinding sunlight, and he put out a hand, not toward her but as though to ward her off. But it was Hattie. She moved quickly across the room to sit beside him and put her arm around him, and he was so damn glad to



see her.

"Hat," he whispered and felt the tears start again. "Aw, Hat, was it my fault?"

"No, Bill."

"Hat, I've got to call up and see if they got him out of that goddam little car, and I don't even know where they took him."

"I'll do it," Hattie said. She got up and went into the hall to the phone.

He could hear her voice, but not what she was saying. He got up and poured himself another drink and slopped bourbon all over the top of the TV and saw Keith glance quickly away and pretend he hadn't seen. If only Hat hadn't said that about Keith not liking him. If only—the words went down into him like a pair of pliers and caught hold of the root of himself way down somewhere and yanked, painfully, and pulled loose. He thought of Bea going off with Bannerman like that, but it didn't make a damn any more. There were so many things swarming and buzzing around him, like mosquitoes that always escaped when he tried to catch one, except for the awful irrefutable single fact.

Hattie came back in. She nodded to him.

He nodded back. "I don't know why I kept worrying about it, Hat, but—" She sat down on the couch and put her arm around him and held his hand lightly in her strong hand. Slowly he bent over until his face was in her lap. "Jesus, Hattie," he whispered, "What'd I *do*? What'd I do wrong?"

He felt her hand pat his back, twice, and then rest there. He felt as he had as a little kid when everything had gone wrong and his mother had cuddled him in her lap to make it all right again. But this time there was no way. "That poor little kid," he whispered. "Why'd it happen, Hat?"

"I don't know, Bill."

He rested with his cheek against her thigh, his eyes open. *You don't have it for me any more, Bill. He's never liked you much.* He remembered it without rancour, and knew that she was only sorry for him now because he had lost his son. And Keith was only sorry for him. They were just being good peo-

ple. He sat up abruptly, feeling the understanding in his stomach like a lead bowling ball. Keith had risen and was standing with his back to the room, holding the drape open a little and looking out. A slice of light came across the room like a yellow triangular knife.

Keith turned and said to Hattie, "I'd better go try to find her. I guess I'd better go." Keith moved slowly toward the door, raised a hand toward him in a hesitant gesture, went out.

He sat there with Hat, and it was strange being alone with her. "He's a boy you ought to be pretty proud of, Hat," he said.

"Yes," she said. Then she said, "He thinks it's all his fault. And I think you think it's all yours. And I— but we all did it, Bill. You know that, don't you?"

He only shook his head. I don't know anything, he thought; I've never known anything. He knew only that Hattie and Keith came out of a different bottle. What the hell could they ever be to him anyway? They weren't for him. Crying like a goddam baby and hiding his head in Hat's lap, and talking to Keith as though he were trying to be Keith's dad or something. But now he was over it.

He got to his feet. "All I know is you were right the other day, Hat," he said. "And I was trying to have it both ways. But you can't have it both ways."

Hattie was staring up at him, and he didn't want to see what he saw in her face. He squared his shoulders, swung around, and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Hattie said.

"Downtown."

"Bill," she said, but he didn't stop. Outside he was blinded by the bright sunlight. He stared straight up at the sun until his aching eyes cleared and dried.

Then he turned back. Hattie was standing in the doorway, one hand braced against the frame. He tried to grin at her. "You were right, Hat," he said. "She's the kind for me." He meant it both defiantly and humbly. Hattie didn't speak as he got into the Cad, and he backed out of the driveway fast. Keith

was nowhere in sight. In the street the convertible had been pulled over against the curb, and there was no sign that anything had happened there at all.

But as he started forward he saw the spots on the pavement that might have been blood, might have been only oil stains. He trod down hard on the accelerator and the Cadillac rushed on down Ocean Avenue. He turned up to Highway 101, south on the highway, going toward San Diego and the lots, maybe to the radio station, maybe to the office to see if anything was up, then to see Ardath. That was enough. That was all there was. Hell, yes, he said to himself, watching the speedometer needle swing over to seventy, feeling the wind rushing against his burning face, two hundred and thirty horses under the hood of the eight-thousand-dollar Cadillac convertible racing and pulsing with the power of his right foot. Hell, yes! he said to himself. Hell yes, that was all!

THE END